

ON HOLY HILLS WHERE FIRES ONCE BURNED

An Hour of Light and Stillness for All Hallows' Eve

1.

God, when the autumn shadows stretch
Across the fading land,
We walk by faith through mist and dusk,
Held fast within Your hand.

*On holy hills where fires once burned
Against the gathering night,
Your saints proclaimed the risen Christ,
The world's enduring light.*

2.

The rowan gleams with scarlet fruit,
The hawthorn stands apart;
Their signs recall Your guarding grace,
Your cross in every heart.

*On holy hills where fires once burned
Against the gathering night,
Your saints proclaimed the risen Christ,
The world's enduring light.*

3.

Where foxes tread the darkened fields
And badgers roam unseen,
Your Spirit moves through earth and sky,
Through all that lies between.

*On holy hills where fires once burned
Against the gathering night,
Your saints proclaimed the risen Christ,
The world's enduring light.*

4.

The goldcrest wears its crown of gold,
The bittern calls unseen;
They speak of saints and mysteries
In lands that lie between.

*On holy hills where fires once burned
Against the gathering night,
Your saints proclaimed the risen Christ,
The world's enduring light.*

5.

Though mists may veil the distant shore
Beyond our mortal sight,
The cloud of witnesses abides
In glory's dawning light.

*On holy hills where fires once burned
Against the gathering night,
Your saints proclaimed the risen Christ,
The world's enduring light.*

6.

So keep us, God, this hallowed eve,
When dark and light appear;
Until all fear is lost in love,
And heaven's song draws near.

*On holy hills where fires once burned
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Your saints proclaimed the risen Christ,
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Outline of the Service

0–5 min

Gathering and opening prayer

5–13 min

I. Walking through autumn shadows

13–21 min

II. Signs of guarding grace

21–29 min

III. The Spirit in the unseen world

29–37 min

IV. Saints and mysteries

37–45 min

V. The cloud of witnesses

45–53 min

VI. When fear is lost in love

53–60 min

Closing prayers, blessing and departure

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Gathering

The people gather in quietness. The candle is already burning. After a brief period of stillness, the leader begins.

As the year turns towards winter, and the days grow shorter, we gather in the presence of God.

Outside, the evening is filled with movement, voices, and celebration. Here, we choose another way of marking this night: with stillness, remembrance, and prayer.

This is All Hallows' Eve, the threshold of All Saints' Day.

Tonight, we remember those whose lives have reflected the light of Christ. We give thanks for the natural world around us, for the changing seasons, and for the mystery of God's presence in all things.

We need not fill this hour with words.

We need not explain ourselves.

We are invited simply to be present.

The candle before us is a reminder that the light of Christ continues to shine, even when the world around us grows dark.

Let us pray.

God of light and life,
You are present in the changing seasons,
in the silence of the evening,
and in the quiet places of our hearts.

As we gather on this hallowed eve,
open our eyes to Your presence,
our ears to Your still, small voice,
and our hearts to the company of Your saints.

Let this hour be a place of rest,
a time of remembering,
and a moment of peace.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A short silence follows.

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I. Walking through autumn shadows

1.

God, when the autumn shadows stretch
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Reflection

Autumn is a season of change.

The fields are quieter. The evenings draw in. Trees surrender their leaves, and familiar paths take on unfamiliar shapes in the gathering darkness.

There is something honest about autumn. It reminds us that nothing in this world remains unchanged. Our lives have their seasons too.

There are times of growth and confidence, and times when the way ahead seems uncertain. Sometimes we walk through mist, unable to see more than the next few steps.

Yet the hymn reminds us that we do not walk alone.

We are held within God's hand.

We may not know what lies beyond the next bend in the road, but we can trust the One who walks beside us.

Tonight, we are invited to set aside the need to see everything clearly.

Faith does not always remove the mist.

Sometimes faith is simply the courage to continue walking through it.

Invitation to silence

As we enter the silence, think of the changes taking place in your own life.

What are you leaving behind? What lies ahead?

Where might God be holding you, even when the path is unclear?

Five minutes of silence.

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II. Signs of guarding grace

2.

The rowan gleams with scarlet fruit,
The hawthorn stands apart;
Their signs recall Your guarding grace,
Your cross in every heart.

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Reflection

Across Ireland, the rowan and hawthorn have long held a place in the imagination of our people.

They stand in hedgerows, beside old paths, and on the edges of fields.

Generations have associated them with protection, mystery, and the unseen world.

For Christians, the natural world can become a reminder of something deeper: the grace of God, quietly sustaining creation.

The scarlet berries of the rowan stand out against the fading colours of autumn.

They remind us that beauty does not disappear when the season changes.

And the hawthorn, standing alone, reminds us that even the most ordinary things can become places of attention and wonder.

We do not need to search for God only in extraordinary experiences.

God may be encountered in a familiar tree, a quiet garden, or the simple kindness of another person.

The saints understood this.

Holiness is not confined to great cathedrals or distant monasteries.

It can grow in the ordinary soil of everyday life.

Invitation to silence

Think of a place in nature that brings you peace.

A tree, a river, a hillside, or perhaps a small garden.

Give thanks for the beauty of creation, and for the ways in which God has cared for you through the ordinary things of life.

Five minutes of silence.

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III. The Spirit in the Unseen World

3.

Where foxes tread the darkened fields
And badgers roam unseen,
Your Spirit moves through earth and sky,
Through all that lies between.

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Reflection

As darkness settles across the countryside, another world begins to stir.

Foxes make their way through fields and hedgerows. Badgers emerge from their setts. Creatures seldom seen in daylight begin their familiar journeys.

Much of life takes place beyond our sight.

We may never see the fox passing through the garden or the badger crossing the lane, but their lives continue whether or not we are watching.

The same is true of God's presence.

We do not always recognise the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we expect God to speak through great events, dramatic moments, or unmistakable signs.

Yet the Spirit often works quietly.

Through patience.

Through an unexpected kindness.

Through the courage to begin again.

Through the simple act of remaining beside someone who is suffering.

On this evening, when stories of the unseen world fill the imagination, we remember that the deepest mystery is not something to fear.

It is the presence of God, who fills heaven and earth.

Invitation to silence

In the quiet, consider the ways in which God may have been at work in your life without your noticing.

Give thanks for those unseen acts of kindness and grace that have helped carry you through difficult days.

Five minutes of silence.

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IV. Saints and mysteries

4.

The goldcrest wears its crown of gold,
The bittern calls unseen;
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Reflection

The goldcrest is one of our smallest birds, yet it wears a crown of gold.

The bittern, hidden among the reeds, is more often heard than seen.

One catches the eye through its delicate beauty. The other makes its presence known through a voice rising from the marsh.

Both remind us that significance is not measured by size or visibility.

The same is true of the saints.

When we think of saints, we may imagine great names from history: Patrick, Brigid, Columba, or those whose lives shaped the faith of this island.

Yet the communion of saints is much greater than the names written in calendars.

It includes countless ordinary people whose faithfulness was never recorded.

Those who prayed quietly.

Those who cared for neighbours.

Those who taught children, tended the sick, welcomed strangers, and kept faith through difficult years.

Their lives may have seemed small in the eyes of the world.

But in the kingdom of God, no act of love is insignificant.

Tonight, we remember that holiness may be found in the smallest and quietest lives.

Invitation to silence

Bring to mind someone whose quiet goodness has shaped your life.

They may be living or departed.

Give thanks for their example, and for the ways in which their light continues to shine.

Five minutes of silence.

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V. The cloud of witnesses

5.

Though mists may veil the distant shore
Beyond our mortal sight,
The cloud of witnesses abides
In glory's dawning light.

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Reflection

There are places in Ireland where the mist settles so thickly that the far shore disappears.

We know the land is still there, though we cannot see it.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us.

It is a beautiful image for this evening.

The Christian life is not a solitary journey.

We belong to a story that began long before us, and which will continue long after our own lives have ended.

We are joined in faith with those who have gone before.

Some are remembered by the whole Church.

Others are remembered only by a family, a friend, or a small community.

And some have no one left to speak their names.

Yet none is forgotten by God.

All Hallows' Eve invites us to remember with gratitude, but also with tenderness.

For some, remembrance brings joy.

For others, it brings grief, regret, or the ache of an absence that never entirely disappears.

There is room for all these feelings in the presence of God.

We do not need to turn grief into happiness.

We need only bring it into the light of Christ.

Invitation to silence

During this silence, you may wish to remember someone who has died.

Speak their name quietly in your heart.

Give thanks for their life.

If grief is present, allow yourself to feel it without needing to change it.

Rest in the promise that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Five minutes of silence.

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VI. When fear is lost in love

6.

So keep us, God, this hallowed eve,
When dark and light appear;
Until all fear is lost in love,
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Reflection

We have spent this hour reflecting on autumn, creation, mystery, remembrance, and the communion of saints.

Now we return to the candle before us.

Its flame is small.

It cannot illuminate every corner of the building.

Yet it changes the darkness around it.

The light does not need to be overwhelming to be real.

The First Letter of John tells us that perfect love casts out fear.

This is not a promise that life will always be easy, or that we will never feel afraid.

It is a reminder that fear does not have the final word.

The love of God is greater.

On this night, when darkness is often made into something frightening, we remember that darkness itself is not our enemy.

It is part of the rhythm of creation.

Night brings rest.

Winter prepares the earth for renewal.

And even in the darkest hours, the light of Christ remains.

We are invited to carry that light into our homes, our communities, and our ordinary lives.

Not necessarily through great achievements, but through small acts of compassion, courage, and love.

The fires on the ancient hills have long since faded.

But the light of Christ has not.

Invitation to silence

Look towards the candle.

Consider where light is needed in your own life, in your community, and in the wider world.

Ask God to help you carry that light gently and faithfully.

Five minutes of silence.

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Closing prayers and blessing

The leader allows the final silence to settle before beginning.

Prayer of thanksgiving

God of all the saints,
We thank You for this hour of quietness.

For the beauty of the autumn earth,
for the creatures of field and woodland,
for the mysteries of creation,
and for the light that shines in darkness.

We thank You for the saints of every generation:
for those whose names are honoured throughout the Church,
and for those whose lives are known only to You.

We remember with love those who have died,
and we commend them to Your eternal mercy.

Give rest to the weary,
comfort to the grieving,
peace to the troubled,
and courage to those who walk through uncertainty.

As we return to the world beyond these walls,
help us to carry Your light into every place we go.

Through Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. **Amen.**

A final reading — John 1:5

The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

The Lord's Prayer

All are invited to join in the Lord's Prayer, using the form familiar to the congregation.

Blessing

May Christ, the Light of the World, shine upon your path.

May the communion of saints remind you that you never walk alone.

If the leader is a priest:

And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

If the leader is not a priest:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

The service ends in quietness. The candle remains burning while people depart, and is safely extinguished afterwards.