

ALL SAINTS 2024

St Michael's

Our Gospel reading today is Jesus' inaugural address in the Gospel of Matthew. It is in some sense the introduction to the sermon on the mount which follows. And what an introduction it is. Right from the outset Jesus conveys in strong yet simple words the character of the new kingdom that he is inaugurating and what citizenship of this kingdom looks like. That is why, appropriately the Beatitudes reading today has traditionally been connected with the great Feast of All Saints. It lays out in no uncertain terms the blueprint of sainthood. Those great figures of Christian history who inspire us today.

But more importantly perhaps It is a reminder to us all of how the kingdom of God is lived out, not just a distant hope but an earthy spirituality, grounded in the midst of our difficulties and trials, and the often messiness of life. For this is where God meets us, through the person of Jesus. Who then loves us and empowers us so that we too may become citizens of that kingdom.

And so today, we have Jesus speaking to the crowds of eager disciples. However, the context of such a teaching as the beatitudes is not just an individual pep talk. It is a speech to a large gathering of people. To the gathered community. And that is one of the things we remember on All Saints. That the church isn't just us as individuals, but that we belong to a great cloud of witnesses.

We get a profound sense of this cloud of witnesses from our readings today, particularly Revelation. The readings speak about an end to death, grief, pain, sorrow. They tell us that heaven is a place where separation from God or separation from others doesn't exist anymore. Unity with God and with all people is the goal.

However, it can all sound too good to be true, can't it? Our lives don't seem to be like that. We may be struggling with the pain of grief or disappointment, anxiety from what life throws at us. There are many things which cause grief and pain. So, we may find it hard to believe what the readings are telling us about life. These promises of life are not trying to deny the grief we all feel. But rather an expression of the hope we have in the goodness and love of God.

The Beatitudes remind us of this. How God comes into the world and breaks through into our lives. It is not through the power of kingship or warmongering but through humility, meekness and love. And so, our God is one who became like us, who was moved with compassion and deeply disturbed at the pain of the world. For Jesus is not unmoved or detached from the tragedy of human life. And because he is involved he wants to do something about it.

But how are we to live with the reality of grief, pain and death and yet also have hope in the resurrection? The beatitudes seem to hint that we have to live with the paradox which our lives contain. For how can the poor and persecuted be blessed?

One of the curious paradoxes is that it is not until we accept the reality of this situation, the reality that life is not perfect, that hope returns and we find life. It is a process of transition which we have to go through. That is the reality of our experience which is described so well in the readings. The Christian message is that life comes through death. So how then

are we to experience this life through death on this Feast of All Saints?

5

I was talking to the school children on Friday about visiting their grandparents house and looking at all the old photographs that they may have on their walls. All those who were loved deeply but our now gone.

I reminded them that all these strangely dressed people in yellowing photos hold such an important part in our lives. They are ancestors, people who have died but now live through their images and the memories they invoke.

6

Today as we celebrate All Saints, we behold these photos anew. All the saints, those known to us and those unknown. We want to look at these people and know we belong to this great family of those who belong to God. I'm sure that over the years as you

have celebrated this feast you will have been told many times; we are the saints. The letters of Paul are often addressed to the saints in a particular place. That means all the followers of Jesus in that town were the saints.

And the same applies to anyone who follows Jesus now. So why then do we look to the Saints today? Well, many of these saints of the past didn't do anything heroic, or powerful in worldly terms. They just tried to witness to their faith in their daily living. It was that ordinariness of trying to follow God's call that led some of them to extraordinary devotion and deeds of service. Others are remembered for simple consistency and faithfulness to their call. Now we say we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses – those who held fast to their faith even when it brought suffering and death.

7

Therefore, we can take heart from their example, even if it seems a little remote from our own life. We take heart because as we learn from our readings it is not what we do that matters, but what God does through us. It is God who provides the heavenly banquet, it is God who takes away grief, it is God who raises the dead.

Maybe we can ask ourselves this All Saints “How is God seen in my daily living? Does the glory of God shine in me like it does in the saints? How might we as a parish show the glory of God in this community which surrounds us? Is the love of God made visible by our service to this community where we are the heart?

8

If we seek the prayers and protection of All the Saints, then we hope to become like them. We too can reveal the love and glory of God, the one who came among us to not to be served, but to serve.