

All Saints Day 2017 - Fr Michael

From the image in our first reading, of the saints around the throne of God, their robes washed white, to the second reading from John which speaks of us all as children of God, who will be like Jesus for we shall see him as he is, through to our gospel reading, those amazing words of the beatitudes, all these passages are speaking of holiness.

We are baptised into holiness.

This building was made holy when it was consecrated to God, the chalice we will drink from in communion was made holy by being consecrated to God and similarly we are made holy at baptism by being consecrated to God. We were made part of a new creation, were given a share in the divine nature in that we are made in the image of God, we joined the family of the church by being made brothers and sisters - friends of God, we were given the Holy Spirit, we were sanctified in all these ways.

We are holy from baptism but we strive to become holier. The gospel reading helps us to understand that journey, as Jesus describes the way we should live, the life of holiness. Inhabiting the beatitudes is like putting Christ on, for he was the beatitudes in the flesh. We would all like to be like Jesus, and when we hear the beatitudes we are shown Jesus' good news in words. They are the call to holiness. A list of blessings, items of wonderful news about God's work that Jesus was saying is beginning with him. Jesus announced wonderful news for the poor, the bereaved, the humble and the peacemakers. The beatitudes are the covenant for Jesus' followers as they journey towards the kingdom.

We are the family of the church, the family of God and today we celebrate those members of our family who have gone on ahead, the saints in heaven. St Paul frequently calls Christians 'the saints.' He didn't mean just those special people who we think of as perfect in holiness. He meant all of us. The famous saints are all too often just like us, they struggled just as we do. Look at St Peter, head of the church, yet a man who denied Christ three times and often seemed to get it wrong, he later proved amazingly faithful. Mother Theresa of Calcutta who lived with doubt yet kept on caring and loving to the end.

The saints had ordinary human parents like us. They had trials, doubts, conflicts and concerns. They shared our sinfulness and our weakness, knowing life's ups and downs. God frequently glorifies weak and ordinary people, as we discover in the Bible - look at Mary, a poor peasant girl yet called to give birth to God in the form of his Son.

Then there are all those saints who no one knows about, ordinary men, women and children who have lived life for God alone. Members of our own family who prayed for us when they were alive on earth and who I have no doubt continue to pray for us now. It seems to me totally fitting for us to continue to pray for them too. We are all part of one great big family at prayer. The famous saints, the unknown saints, our relatives, ancestors and ourselves all at prayer, praying to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit united in our love for God. This is our common life in God which strengthens our hope of future glory in the new creation, the new Jerusalem.

Our common life in God is our call to be a holy people and our trust that we will belong to the communion of saints, and as the psalm today says, we are the people who long to see God's face. Today, this Sunday, and every Sunday is our dress rehearsal for our eternal Sabbath. In the Eucharist we get a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and at the mass we must be closest to the saints and our loved ones as we receive Jesus in bread and wine, which unites us with those in heaven who see the face of Jesus.

In our first reading the saints gather around the throne and the lamb is their shepherd just as we gather around the altar, around the lamb, our shepherd, Saviour, friend, lover and Lord, Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Hold tight to all that is good, all that is holy, all that is life giving and all that is loving, for that is the way to a perfect and holy life, a life devoted and dedicated to God.

Amen.