

St Peter's, Mount Park Road, Ealing  
All Saints Sunday  
2<sup>nd</sup> November 2014

I can't do that!

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I wonder if like me you sometimes find the brilliance of others debilitating. One of my treats is to watch the Graham Norton show on Friday evenings. For those unfamiliar with it the programme is basically a chat show. One on which celebrities, of varying degrees of fame, appear to have a jolly friendly chat and promote their latest book or film or album or play. They laugh and joke and sometimes have fun with the audience. Anyway, the audience sit and watch and the viewer is entertained. Sometimes the spectator may even marvel at the guests achievements. We are presented with witty, beautiful, clever people, achievers and high flyers in their field, mainly of entertainment.

This celebrity thing can leave me feeling a little hollow and occasionally a little angry. There on the screen or in the magazine article is a person, a bit younger than me, actually these days often a lot younger than me, who has achieved all this stuff and who am I, what have I achieved, where has my life gone? How does my life stack up to theirs? One may be tempted either to mimic these modern day icons or occasionally be put down by the image. I often wonder how many of those who find themselves locked in eating disorders or cycles of self-harm have gotten there because of a depressed self-image seen in the light of such perfection. It isn't that simple of course but there must be some element that has added to this state of life. How can anyone live up to these images and ideals? Of course no one should; but then...

One of the issues one might have the All Saints-tide is that of trying to live up to standards or expectations. Presented in the life of the church, remembered in the daily lectionary and now, at the end of the Christian year, celebrated as a group who have achieved salvation how can we live up to their standards of holiness and sanctity? When a young Christian I actually found this whole thing rather debilitating. I couldn't pray as well as the saints, I couldn't do miracles or inspire people. What good was I to the ministry of God?

And then you read Paul, he who used the term saints in connection with the people of God, the children of the kingdom. He referred to the members of

the church as saints. The term, clearly had a different weight in Paul's use but I am left wondering if he isn't actually on the right track.

The temptation is often to measure ourselves against others and that other is often that which we think is better.

On reading the Beatitudes as in today's gospel reading are we left thinking these are about someone else, some other group or groups of perfect individuals? Back to these saints that set a standard we cannot hope to attain? And then we take a closer look. These are not heroes as we may understand them. Maybe anti-heroes, broken spirits that are lost in the confusion of life. The poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst, the meek, those who mourn. Not exactly your celebrity types.

As usual Jesus presents a view of the world different from that of the accepted norm. One that initially challenges and then opens doors for us. For in the last of the groups mentioned he personalises the type by addressing you. "Blessed are you" he says. As we get to the end of the Beatitudes we realise Jesus has been addressing us all along. We are the poor in spirit, we are those who mourn, we are the meek. Humanity is bound up in the Beatitudes. These are not impossible statements of perfection that define sainthood in that exclusiveness sense. These recognise that in the ordinariness of daily life, as we work with broken and challenged spirit or personal grief we are loved and blessed by God. This is where the root of salvation lies. In us, not in some perfection that cannot be achieved but in our existence as we struggle to live as good Christians in a world that challenges us and criticises us.

In this light we look again at the title saint and realise that yes there are special people who have given us examples of the holy life or who have taught us and shared with us ways to live our life of faith in the love of God and the power of the spirit; but there is also you and me, the ordinary faithful servant of God who gets up each morning trying to bring glory to God whilst keeping body and soul together in the struggles of existence. We are saints and today is our day.