

All Saints Matthew 5:1-12

So after the increasingly commercialised celebration of All Hallows Eve, or Halloween as it is commonly known, we celebrate today All Hallows Day, or All Saints' Day. Just like Christmas Eve is almost a feast day itself as it points us to Christmas Day, so Halloween has become a stand-alone event, but unlike Christmas, for most people the celebration ends at Halloween. All Saints is barely perceptible, there are no cards or gifts to recognise it, most people would be unaware of its existence let alone its significance. So how come we get all excited for the commemoration of things sinister & evil and but pay little or no attention to those people who stand and have through the ages stood in stark contrast to this, live out lives of goodness, truth and love?

Let's consider our gospel reading, the Beatitudes. This section of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount has already been part of our lectionary this year and it is so important that it appears again on this feast of All Saints. The beatitudes are a number of descriptors for what those who are blessed in the kingdom of God will look like. In many ways they are a different way of describing the fruits of the spirit that St Paul talked about, we can imagine that it was this description by Jesus of what the kingdom values look like in the human family that inspired St Paul to list out the character fruits that are necessarily evident in those who live by grace as children of God.

We are taught that those who are blessed by Jesus are not necessarily those who are considered successful in society. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are hungry and thirsty for right to prevail, those who are persecuted for their faith and the list goes on. These 'blessed' people appear to be those who are having a dreadful time in life, sad, mournful, frustrated and generally lacking something. These people may be worthy of pity but Jesus doesn't say 'pity the meek', he says they are already blessed. It is not that Jesus is asking those who are listening to him to go out and bless these people on the margins of society with good things, although there is never any prohibition against sharing resources and being a blessing to others. Rather, Jesus is stating an already fixed reality – blessed are these people – they are already precious in God's sight.

If ever there was a teaching to convince us that God's priorities are not the same as human priorities, this should be it. We are taught that it is in the reality of living a life meekly and without fanfare that we do the work of God, it is through the work of struggling against injustice that we play our part as citizens of God's kingdom. It is not that we seek after these things as some sort of prize to prove ourselves to God, but rather, God comes alongside us as we face the trials of our lives and if we recognise God's presence we are blessed by the strength and peace that presence brings. Trust in God's guiding and leading allows us to forge the difficult and sometimes ridiculous path that is laid out before us. We step out in faith knowing that others will think we are foolish because by faith the foolish are made wise. The attributes of the beatitudes are visible in the Saints of the church calendar and they serve as an ever-present reminder to us of what it looks like to be in the presence of a saint.

So what does this have to do with Halloween and our faith journey here and now? Well the first thing to be clear about is that All Hallows' Eve and All Saint's Day as well

as the feast of All Soul's Day tomorrow were meant to be a triffecta of Christian worship which starts by bringing together an acknowledgement of all that is evil and bad in order to ridicule it and show we are a people who have, through Christ, conquered evil and death. Next we celebrate all that is good and true on the feast of All Saint's in stark contrast to what has gone before and then finally we give thanks for those who have gone before us in our family, our church and our community throughout the ages, reminding ourselves that God is God of the living and we have a hope, through Christ, of new life and restoration of relationship with the great cloud of saintly witness when we too are called home. To take any single feast or celebration in isolation is to miss the powerful effect of the whole.

In this context we take today to call to mind saintly persons in our life and of our own inspiration. We can look to the Saints of the Christian calendar whose lives and witness have inspired generations of Christians and we may wish to look up a particular Saint and be reminded of their story today, comparing their experience with the beatitudes to see what their blessings looked like. Equally important is to take time to think of the saints all around us, saints with a small 's' who quietly witness in our families, our church and our community. Hopefully the result of our musings and reflections will be a new found inspiration for seeking after a beatitude that is important in our lives at the moment, and it may be something new as we move through the stages and chapters of our life and faith. Let us find something in our relationship with God which marks us out as blessed and witness to it that we may all be an inspirations to those with whom we share this journey.