

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. *Matthew 5:1-12*

We are not asked to make plaster cast saints of those we love who have died.

What a relief it is that God calls each and every one of us to be disciples of Jesus Christ just as we are. We are saints in the making yet sinners one and all. Each and every one of us is known by name and loved by God. God longs for us to be the best versions of ourselves possible. But God knows that we fall short and that despite our good intentions we turn away from that love, we sin, many times a day. In and through Christ Jesus we have the opportunity to repent which in the Greek – metanoia - means literally to turn around. We turn around back to God, we receive God's forgiveness and we try again. As we try again, as we re-orientate, we allow ourselves to be shaped by God's values and God's concerns.

Today's celebration of All Saints is a celebration of all those faithful Christians who have allowed their lives to be shaped by the good news of Jesus Christ. Time and again, they too messed up, sinned and turned away from Christ, yet like us they repented, received God's forgiveness and tried again. I daresay that we all have our favourite saint who inspires us in our Christian journey: Martha who tamed the dragon, Peter who misspoke on so many occasions yet had such an important role to play in the leadership of the early church, Janini Luwum, Archbishop of the Church of Uganda who resisted the regime of the dictator Idi Amin. Yet today is an occasion to celebrate saints who are not famous. They are not special people in the sense that they will appear in a stained glass window or be canonised. They are ordinary men and women and children who in their lives and through their faith point us to God.

Let's be honest. I don't think that any of us would be comfortable at the thought that we are saints. If we had to choose between the labels 'saints' and 'sinners', we would go for the latter – sinners one and all. But think for a moment. Who are the people who throughout your life have helped you or inspired you? Who are those who have revealed to you

something of the nature of God? It may be a parent, a teacher, a child, a colleague or a friend. Hopefully, we all see glimpses of God in others, in the values they live by and in the choices they make as they respond to the challenges and opportunities of daily living.

Amongst the many things that we have realised afresh during the pandemic is the fact that we all need one another and, I believe, we all need God too. So it is that we have the opportunity to continue what has been called 'the tradition of sainthood' by living a God shaped life. This is described in our bible reading in what are known as the beatitudes. Jesus suggests that we are living a God shaped life when we are peacemakers, pure in heart, merciful, people whose hunger and work for justice draws others to God. To put it another way, those who try to live the beatitudes continue the tradition of sainthood by quietly loving and helping others, including those who might revile and persecute them.

Malcolm Guite puts it like this in his poem *A last beatitude*:

And blessed are the ones we overlook;
The faithful servers on the coffee rota,
The ones who hold no candle, bell or book
But keep the books and tally up the quota,
The gentle souls who come to 'do the flowers'
The quiet ones who organise the fete,
Church sitters who give up their weekday hours,
Doorkeepers who may open heaven's gate.
God knows the depths that often go unspoken
Amongst the shy, the quiet and the kind,
Or the slow healing of a heart long broken,
Placing each flower so for a year's mind.
Invisible on earth, without a voice,
In heaven their angels glory and rejoice.

As we celebrate all the faithful saints, we also remember all the faithful souls. In Christ the living and the departed dwell together in what we call the communion of saints which is bound together in prayer. All Souls is a special time to remember those we love who have died. This year our remembrance may be particularly poignant as so many of us have been unable to mourn the death of family members, neighbours and friends as we would have wished. Perhaps then this makes the ritual of remembering even more important. We remember before God and commit to God's sure keeping those who have lived lives of faith, love and service - saints and sinners all.

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. May they rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.

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