

## **ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY, 2024.**

I confess that I was in a pub in Cumbria last week, 'The Punch Bowl', and on the wooden beams I noticed this arresting quotation painted in white. It is a proper 'strapline' and so, just one sentence:

"There is no such thing as strangers, just friends you have never met."

That's a very fitting summary of today's special Feast of All Saints'. If, on our mid-week Thursday 10am Eucharist in Woodbridge (which is very well supported and coffee served afterwards), a particular Saint is remembered...

I always like to say a few words or give a 'potted history' – flesh to the bones, if you will, of a special Christian life. Whether centuries ago or, more recently; whether this biography is very full or somewhat sketchy, it is always good to remember and to give thanks for, their special contribution. It is always good to find out more about their inspiration and gift to the thread and weave of Christian history and tradition – which we are called to inhabit or 'own' in our own day. What do I mean, you may ask?

Well, it can take courage to trust God's power in the face of overwhelming circumstances that appear to have no way of escape, but Lazarus' story reminds us that death no longer has the last word. God in Christ can bring life out of death and joy out of sorrow. What I really mean is that Saints are not cardboard cut-outs. They really are friends we haven't

met and whom we instinctively know and appreciate and love.

You will have favourites, I feel sure. In no particular order, they may include St Francis, St Peter, St Paul, St Edmund or Mary, the Mother of our Lord; St Cecilia, St Lucy or the beloved disciple, St John.

In my list I would want to add St Dunstan because he could multi-task in ways I could only dream of! He could make beautiful metalwork in his foundry as well as being a bell founder himself and scribe of illuminating beautiful manuscripts and the revival of church art. He also played the harp and wrote several fine hymns. I should mention that he slipped in becoming Archbishop of Canterbury whilst also being an accomplished ambassador and politician at the highest level in the reign of King Edgar. He could also 'dirty his hands' in founding new monasteries and churches for all to see, admire and enjoy! His faith and energy was not academic only or, individualistic at all. He literally inspired and built Christian communities and houses of prayer which pointed away from himself towards the creativity instead of the craftsmanship, beauty, and service to God and His people. His was a priestly and prophetic role.

All God's Saints' in so many different and exciting ways, knew the pattern of death and resurrection at the core of their being. They remind us that, as Lazarus discovered, Jesus is life for us on both sides of the grave. The challenge and the joy in remembering each of them, singing a litany for them, is that

they still pray for us, to encourage our own Christian journey in good times and in bad.

I am not too proud to say that I have often prayed to St Anthony of Padua when I have lost my glasses, or church keys, or... PCC Treasurer! But there is the more serious statement of faith or 'strapline' that these Saints really are our friends who long for us to stay close to Christ and to discover our richest of vocations through Him who found us all those years ago, and called us by name, at our Baptism.

That's why today, particularly, the best way to honour these Christ-followers who inspire us, is to look where they are pointing us today, and to respond to God's same call for ourselves, today. A possible question for us: What are we being called to leave, or take on? Is there a past that binds us like grave clothes which now we are liberated from? Where do we hear Jesus' loving authority calling us to 'come out' to live a new life – and to become an integral part of God's liberating fullness, freedom and purpose in such a life, day by day?

I can't improve on that visionary text we heard earlier from Revelation. It says everything about our belonging to the 'Communion of Saints' as if by an inextricable, umbilical cord:

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth. And I saw a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." In other words, we really can do what the saints did, if we strive to marry our

Christian hope and vision with God's calling us to live faithfully and sacramentally as His beloved, His chosen.