

Homily for All Saints Evensong

Readings: Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom) 44.1-15; Revelation 7.9-end

I guess you know by now, that I believe in the Saints' and that their Communion surrounds ours in faith, and hope and love; that their prayers continue for us here in earth to live as followers of Christ's teaching and beatitudes, as if heaven was just around the corner.

I try very hard to keep as many of the saints' anniversaries as I can, especially at our 10am Thursday morning Eucharist, which is very well attended. It is always good to find out more about them, their character and the context in which they lived and died. Sometimes, I appreciate, it can feel like they are the ones who receive the equivalent of 'Oscars' making us feel, sometimes that we are not as good as them, or resolute as them, or whatever.

Only last week, one of the choir sent me this thoughtful and encouraging poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson. It is called, 'Success.'

"What is success?

To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and
the affection of children;

to earn the appreciation of honest critics

and endure the betrayal of false friends;

to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others;

To leave the world a bit better,

whether by a healthy child, a garden patch

Or a redeemed social condition;

To know even one life has breathed easier

because you lived.

This is to have succeeded!”

I guess my more philosophical question is to ask:

‘Did all the Saints, or even some of them, feel that they were successful?’ I would say not, however confident, or indeed fulfilling or transformative their Christian service, witness, or memory still evokes in and through us. In that sense they were just like us, just trying their best to respond to Christ’s calling, and life-enhancing teaching. They were often unsure, nervous even, or afraid, how best to love, serve and follow their Lord. They certainly weren’t going all out for ‘successes’ as if it were a prize to be won...

Today though, they do deserve our thanks and praise, which it is good to reflect upon in the beauty of Word and Song tonight. And we don’t just remember them for the sake of it. We do so because their inspiration could lead us to change and grow in new ways of service in today’s Church, for today’s world. Sometimes, this comes to fruition by writing down practical ways in which we can offer our help, offer our

gifts, and most of all, offer the gift to God to live more sacrificially.

I am sorry to say that contemporary political ambitions and in-fighting are not a good role model for anything like what I am trying to say here. All the latest revelations behind closed doors at NUMBER 10 during the Covid years are a cause of shame and embarrassment, not least the kind of language being used by certain officials of their so-called 'colleagues'.

No, I am reflecting and wanting to say something altogether different – that integrity, commitment and the ability to travel faithfully and hopefully as a Christian community is a sure sign of imitating the lives and struggle of the saints. It is a wonderful and shared calling, where we don't just single out particular individuals or their achievements, so much as living the kind of Christian lives that helps us all to live well in the present moment...

And to build something even better for our future as well as the next generation.

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

That's something Mary had to sing about in her 'Magnificat', a song which will outlive us all and resound for ever in the heavenly banquet - with angels, archangels, and quite a big cast of sinners, and saints, for whom Christ died and saved and glorified!

Glory be...

Alleluia. Amen.