

All Saints - 2021

I wonder what you think of when you hear the word 'saint'?

Books like *Exciting Holiness* record some of the biographical details of these holy and special people. You may also have dipped into a book by Revd Richard Coles – *Legends of the Improbable Saints* – in which the author recounts the lives of some lesser known saints – with reverence, but also often with a twist of humour! It makes for an interesting and enjoyable read.

We heard in our Gospel reading – the Beatitudes a list of those attitudes and behaviours commonly associated with sainthood. They can sound totally counter-cultural to us today. It seems to me that Jesus is declaring blessedness on two groups of people. Those who are naturally quite saintly already; the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart and so on. But also those who seem to be going through difficult times; the poor in spirit...those who are mourning...those who are persecuted and reviled.

Perhaps it is easy to see how readily 'blessable' the first group is, but less so the second group. But, isn't it heartening, that those for whom life is *not* all shiny, perfect, fulfilling and happy right now – and who are all too painfully aware of this - are clearly said to be inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. I derive great comfort from this.

This notion is borne out throughout the gospels, when time after time we see Jesus giving extra attention and care to the dis-eased, marginalised, the 'forgotten'; those for whom life is *not* all rosy and happy.

There are fewer things more sickening than platitudes, or 'helpful solutions' for people who are feeling persecuted or not-in-a-good place, but there is a lifeline of comfort offered at the close of the gospel reading; a reminder that, they or we are *not alone*; we tread a common path with the prophets who have gone before us, and those who will follow. It offers the assurance that despite how it may feel, we *are* deeply loved, valued and cherished precisely *for who* we are, and that God sees in each of us an individual spark of divine beauty and hope.

Furthermore, we do not know how God may use us and others, to inspire people to holiness. If we read the lives of the saints, we can see how many seemingly 'ordinary' people have – clearly not by their own, human strength – become inspirational, often in quiet, unassuming ways, frequently enduring untold persecution and hardship along the way.

But we don't even have to become great 'giants of the faith'. There are also 'living saints' – unsung people who quietly 'get on with it', in works of service.

It is about these people, that Malcolm Guite writes his sonnet entitled '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.

So, even if our contribution feels insignificant or hidden to us, it is known and cherished by God.

Let us all continue to strive to be 'saints' in this, more 'manageable' way; as we are called to be our true *selves*, in loving service to God - and those whom we meet. Amen