



Sunday Reflection

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 1 November 2020

All Saints Day

Today we celebrate the family of God, past, present and future. We celebrate saints who are famous and saints no one has ever heard of. We celebrate that, through the grace and love of God, we too are part of this family.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven"

Matthew 5.21

An Illustration to set the scene

Christians don't deal in deal in platitudes, they deal in beatitudes! In other words, while we have our eyes lifted to heaven, our feet are firmly on the ground.

I won't ask how many of you have taken out a Netflix subscription during COVID. I got one for my Birthday and one of the films I wanted to watch was "The Way", about people who meet up on the *Camino*, the ancient pilgrimage route to Compostella. The main protagonist is following in the steps of his adult son who had died on at the start of making his own pilgrimage. Setting out to discover what made his son tick, he comes to understand more about himself and is forced to admit that he needs other people and to 'get a life' – exactly in fact what his son had told him.



'Saint' is not the word that most readily comes to mind to describe the characters in "The Way" who are both resilient and at times variously hurt, lost and angry. Just like us! But to deny them that title is perhaps to misunderstand what we mean by 'saint'. As well as the exceptional souls we celebrate in the church

calendar, there all those faithful disciples throughout the ages who are now with Christ. In fact, in that sense, we all our saints! Ordinary folks, like those resurrected in Sir Stanley Spencer's picture in the churchyard in Cookham, who examine with interest what is written about them on their gravestones.

We are all, as we heard in the Epistle, 'children of God.' The children of God are a mixed bunch, all both sinners and saints. Sinners because of our human weakness and failure to live up to what we might be, and saints because we have already received the gift of God's transforming love. Astonishingly, we are headed for glory! It is God, not us, who transforms this unpromising material, our lives, into something glorious. It is God who delivers and saves us.

The truth is that we are on a journey of becoming, with one foot on earth and another moving towards heaven. And we're not on our own. Because we are called to travel in community, and we are supported by those faithful souls who have gone ahead us.

Like my cousin Peter, more of an age with my mother than with me. He was a great tease, belying the fact of life of dedicated service (as an army officer) and a deep personal faith. He had known challenge (illness), grief (the death of his beloved

wife) but he had great steadfastness. Though it didn't improve his jokes! When he moved into a residential home, he carried on writing poetry to record the small triumphs and sadnesses of his fellow residents. He had a business card printed that read 'poet in residence'! He used his talents to bring joy to others in the circumstances in which he found himself.

Do you think about heaven or try to imagine it? One thing we know for sure, it will be jam packed with those who have been faithful disciples, transparent now to the light of God, the white robed multitude depicted in the east window of St John's. Their holiness shines out because it is the light of God that has fully entered their lives. And it can light our path so that we in turn can light the way for others. They showed us how to live on earth, and they suggest to us what we will be in heaven. And in heaven we will all be doing what we were created to do – praising God continuously, yes – we will be SINGING!

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's Gospel Jesus confronts us with some startling messages about the path to eternal life. Picture the scene. Jesus

Prayer of the Ninefold Path

Today may I -

Live with open hands

Mourn what's broken

Serve with self respect

Use my power for good

Look with compassion

Walk in honesty

Reach past difference

Suffer for love

And live fearlessly,

Following the way of radical love.

Nine Beats Collective

goes up a mountain in way that recalls Moses. He sits down, like the rabbi and teacher he is. And from the mountain top he gives the view from below – what God's Kingdom would be like if it were realised on earth.

Beatitudes, not platitudes. The 'right living' that is close to the heart of God, is the opposite of received worldly values. Jesus warns that those who follow his way, can expect to be

misunderstood, rejected and even persecuted. A modern rendering of the Beatitudes describes the disciple's way as steps on a ninefold path.

Allowing ourselves to be transformed means taking an active part in that process of becoming, in seeking as disciples, to become more like Christ. Intentionally doing this is what sanctification is about - receiving him in faith, so that that his life can live in us.

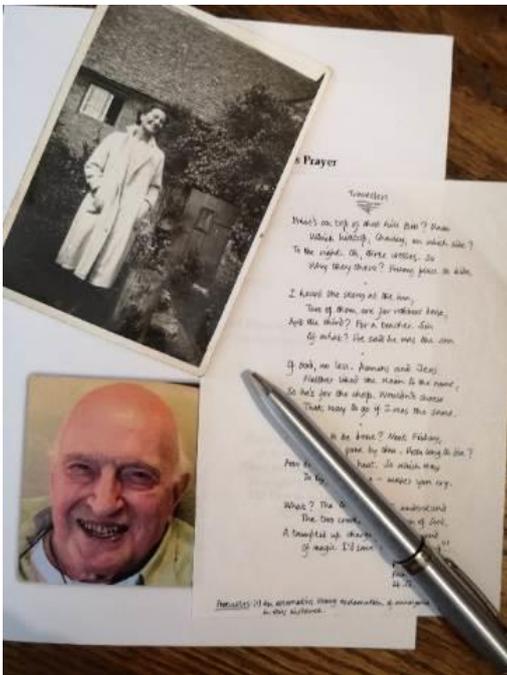
This is one half of what Jesus says. He puts before us the challenge to live in our broken world as if the Kingdom of God were already here. The other half is promise. As well as learning how to live now, on this earth in this time, He shows us a vision of where we are headed, of the Kingdom of Heaven where tears will be dried, and mercy is the dominant value.

Through the Gospels we enter a liminal space in which we glimpse, in Jesus, what the in-breaking of the Kingdom looks like in human life and for the world in the light of our hope of his triumph over death.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

As we come to celebrate the Eucharist, we are gifted the possibility of reaching beyond this time and space into the dimension of heaven as we offer our praise to God in the company of the saints and the heavenly choir. It is Christ who has made this possible. In the liturgy we can ascend because Christ has given us a share in his life. The Orthodox theologian of the Eucharist, Shmemann puts it like this: after we have experienced the new life of the Kingdom in the Eucharist we return as witnesses, shining with light.

The Observing Our Faith (OoF) leaflet you have received suggests a way to connect with the communion of saints. It invites you to remember someone in your own life who has demonstrated those dispositions that have shown the Christian



way or influenced your faith journey. Most of us learn best when we do, as well as just think. So, it asks you to find an object that reflects what's important about that person to you. Then to find a place where you can reflect and to pray for the grace to imitate the characteristic that you admire in that person. You can write your intention in the space on the back of the leaflet.

In the case of my cousin Peter I have chosen the fountain pen as his symbol. I will be praying that I can accept the limitations that inevitably come with age and seek to be content to do what I can, however small, to encourage those around me.

And when you have reflected on your saint don't hide that light under a bushel. Take a picture of your symbol, describe what you admire about your saint and send it to Reuben to put on our OoF pages. In that way we will share what we, as a community of faith, have learnt from the saints we have known about the life of Christ shining in ordinary folk and how to live as faithful disciples with meekness and with joy. And at home, let's open the windows and start practising for glory and eternal praise – and SING!

“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven”
Matthew 5.21

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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