



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

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



For Sunday 3 July 2022

Pentecost 4

Jesus says, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." With confidence we bring our prayers and praises to our heavenly Father.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:20

An Illustration to set the scene

The faces in the National Portrait Gallery in London stare at you from every wall – from paintings, drawings and photographs.

Many of them are well known – the sort of important people whose portraits would be painted for posterity.

Others are wealthy people who could afford to commission a portrait, often shown at the centre of a flourishing family, looking somewhat self-satisfied.

Some are kings and queens.

Some are professional models.

But others are ordinary people, unknown to us but noticed and immortalised by an artist.

Beatrix Potter looks as you would expect of the author of Peter Rabbit – round-faced and friendly.

Winston Churchill's famous frown fixes your gaze.

And Edwin Landseer is a tiny figure overshadowed by the massive Trafalgar Square lions he is carving in his studio.

So many people, portrayed there for our inspection, so many lives now mostly over, so many stories of joy and sadness, of achievement and disaster, written on those faces.

And every one of them known to God, every one of them God's beloved child.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In our Gospel reading we find Jesus taking a practical approach to spreading his message about the kingdom of God.

In the days before electronic media or even – shock horror – the telephone, the best way to advertise a forthcoming event was to send an advance party.

So seventy committed followers are chosen to travel ahead of Jesus, telling people he is on his way and assessing the likely reaction so that he can focus his efforts where they will have most effect.

With little time to spare, Jesus' message needs to be preached where it will be heard and acted on.

You might expect Jesus to be looking for the people with the right kind of belief in God to hear his message and become disciples.

But questioning people about their beliefs is not part of the messengers' brief. Instead, they are to make judgements based on the level of hospitality they receive.

Jesus is looking for audiences who are open-handed and open-minded, happy to welcome new people into their midst and listen to new ideas.

The mission strategy is a great success and the messengers return full of excitement.

They have been performing miracles, they say.

They have generated lots of interest.

All is looking good.

Jesus affirms their enthusiasm, but also reminds them about their priorities.

Running a successful mission is not the most important thing.

It is much more important that “your names are written in heaven”.

There will be successes, and there will be failures.

Jesus’ followers will soon have to deal with what appears to be the biggest failure of all – namely the defeat and death of the one in whom they have placed all their trust.

Then they will need to remember that their names are written in heaven.

They, and the people they have visited on their travels, are known to God.

They are God’s beloved children, and God has a purpose for them and the future of their mission.

Success is good, but not essential. They do not have to earn God’s favour.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

It is easy to slip into thinking that we need to work hard to earn our place in God’s kingdom. And, indeed, there is nothing wrong with making an effort. Strategies for mission and evangelism are important.

The Church has an obligation to make the Gospel known, and we have God-given brains to help us work out how best to do it.

But we do well to remember not to be too excited by our successes, or too discouraged by our failures.

We never need to feel unworthy of God's approval if our efforts have not come up to scratch.

Nor should we feel especially deserving of God's approval if we have achieved much in the service of the kingdom.

Our names are written in heaven, where we have a place, and that is what really matters.

Most of us will never have a portrait hanging on a gallery wall for succeeding generations to gaze at and wonder about.

But all of our faces are imprinted on the mind of God, who knows and loves us, and welcomes us as citizens of the kingdom, whether we succeed or fail.

"Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." *Luke 10:20*

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