

The Bride Valley Service for Sunday 1st November 2020

All Saints

This service can be accessed via the telephone on 01308 293062

To prepare ourselves for our worship, we reflect on the day and on our relationships.

- *What good things have come from God today?*
- *Where have I fallen short?*
- *What will I try to do differently in future?*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Today we honour all the saints, but especially the unrecognised ones. When we look at the saints, we see the seeds of our own possibilities.

Let us call to mind that hold us back from following in the footsteps of the saints.

Lord, you are gracious and compassionate:

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

You are loving to all and your mercy is over all your creation:

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Your faithful servants bless your name and speak of the glory of your kingdom:

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by God's Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect (special prayer for today)

God of holiness, your glory is proclaimed in every age: as we rejoice in the faith of your saints, inspire us to follow their example with boldness and joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

READINGS

Revelation 7:9-end

The multitude from every nation

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and

worshipped God, singing,

‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom

and thanksgiving and honour

and power and might

be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.’

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you are the one that knows.’ Then he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God,

and worship him day and night within his temple,

and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;

the sun will not strike them,

nor any scorching heat;

for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd,

and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 5:1-12

The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

REFLECTION

We are living in a time when numbers are being thrust at us at every turn. The Covid-19 epidemic has exposed us all to the difficulty of trying to get our heads round unimaginably huge numbers – so far there have been 44,071,979 cases of the virus worldwide and 32,318,913 people have recovered. Yet each one of these figures represents a person, and we need to remember that each one of them is known to God. Even though such large numbers **can** be counted, it is nigh on impossible to visualise what that many people, grouped together, would look like.

Then in the reading from Revelation, we are told of a ‘multitude that no-one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.’ No wonder we have words like ‘multitude’, ‘throng’ and ‘crowd’. And then we are told that these are people who ‘have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ These are saints.

And today the Church celebrates All Saints. But what does a saint look like? Most people, I'm sure, can name a few saints - some of those canonised by the Church. But only God can name all the saints. St Paul, in his letters says that all Christians are 'called to be saints' – that includes you and me! It's a bit scary really, but all of us have that potential, and whilst it isn't easy, with God's help we can become who we are called to be.

When Jesus talks to the crowds in today's Gospel reading (the Beatitudes), he gives clear guidelines on how to be a true disciple of his. They are, if you like, the 'Be attitudes'; they tell us how we should **be** in the world. We are to behave counter-culturally. And yet, they are not entirely prescriptive; they are **guidelines**.

We are called to be saints, yes, but we have each been given gifts and talents that make us unique, and if we deny who we are then we are belittling what we have received from God. So often we are encouraged to be like someone else, to behave like them, look like them, think like them. The world pressurises us into conforming to what is often a diminished form of what we can be. God encourages us to be fully and gloriously human, made in his image, with the strengths of gentleness, love and peace. And with his help, we strive to bring the seeds of those gifts to fruition; as ourselves – fulfilling our God-given potential.

There is a story of a young monk called Simon who wished to live a holy life. He decided to model himself on Francis of Assisi; something which he took very seriously. His one goal in life was to turn himself into a copy of St Francis.

Years went by, and there was no doubt that outwardly at least he had made progress. His friends jokingly referred to him as a 'St Francis look-alike.' Yet, he was not happy. In his unhappiness, he went to consult with his spiritual director, an elderly monk, called Barnabas. Barnabas listened patiently as Simon poured out his story, and when he had finished, Barnabas said, 'Simon, you have chosen an excellent model. But a model is not a mould into which we pour ourselves. A model is a spur to help us to be true to what is within us, to what is given to us, and only to us. Simon, you have been living outside yourself. You have been playing a part written for another.'

'The most important task in life is to become ourselves. Unless we become ourselves, no growth, no happiness, no holiness is possible. But when we become ourselves, then everything about us is real and true. Francis of Assisi was a saint, not because he became someone else, but because he became his true and full self. He lived humbly and followed in Christ's footsteps, and allowed his God-given gifts to blossom.

Simon, when you come before the Lord on the day of judgement, he won't ask you, "Why didn't you become Francis of Assisi?" He will ask you, "Why didn't you become what Simon was intended to be?"

So whilst we honour the saints that have gone before us, we need to remember that, as forgiven sinners, we are all saints; each one of us unique, and each one of us known to, and loved by God.

Forget the numbers, forget the 'you should be..', if you want to know what a saint looks like, just look in the mirror and praise God for making you **you**.

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'.

Be with us today, as we offer ourselves to you.

**Hear our prayers for others and for ourselves,
and keep us in your care. Amen**

Glorious God, as we celebrate the lives of those Church members who have shone with the brightness of your love, we offer you ourselves and our lives in fresh commitment and conscious awareness of our need for you as a community and as individual Christians.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Powerful God, may your kingdom of love and peace be established in this world, and grow. We pray for both the influential and the ignored, both the popular and the disliked, both the ambitious and the vulnerable. Teach us your ways and your values.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we call to mind our families and friends, and all those from whom we are parted at this present time, thanking you for all their loving care and forgiveness, and asking your light to shine in all areas of hurt and misunderstanding.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Healing God, we bring to you those whose lives are darkened by pain, fear or weariness. Come to our aid; help us to bear what must be carried, and take from us all resentment and bitterness, replacing it with the abundance of peace.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Eternal God, we thank you for all the saints – those recognised by the Church and those known only to a few, and to you. We praise you for their example and rejoice that they live in your heaven with every tear wiped away. In your mercy, may all who have died in your friendship know your lasting peace.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious God, you can take us as we are and transform us by your life in us. Clear our lives of all that is not of you, so that we may let your goodness shine through the colours of our personalities and gifts you have given us, and become the people you call us to be.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Gathering together all our prayers, we say the prayer that Jesus gave us

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen**

We give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with us now

**Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen**

We pray God's blessing on each other

May God, who kindled the fire of his love in the hearts of the saints, pour upon you the riches of his grace.

May he give you joy in their fellowship, and a share in their praises.

May he strengthen you to follow them in the way of holiness and to come to the full radiance of glory.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and remain with you, and those whom you love and pray for
this day and for evermore. **Amen**

