



SUNDAY 31 OCTOBER 2021

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

The Feast of All Saints (B): Matthew 5: 1-12

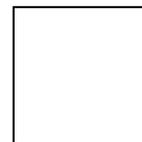
My old mate Chris got talking about death one day - his own death, no less. I asked him how he felt about becoming a saint. He looked at me as if I was mad. We got into conversation about saintliness. In an age of celebrities, media heroes, heroines, and a longing for fame, saints don't figure on the scales. We've given insufficient prominence to the service and ministries of many of the followers of Jesus and the lack is shocking.

Chris was turned off by miserable pious statues that far from making holiness attractive, were, and remain disgraceful caricatures of extraordinary individuals. We've given our saints a poor press and reduced the common understanding of the Church's call to universal holiness down to it being the preserve of small numbers of high fliers in the world of prayer.

This weekend we celebrate - yes celebrate - the feast of All Saints. You've known and met many. Saints are people whose goodness in the middle of life's untidy and demanding journey have mirrored for us something of the patience and love of God - people who we regard as meriting the Lord's welcome into heaven. They're not plaster cast saints. They're flesh and blood, cracked and faulted people. They go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, put up with suffering and carry crosses. Whether they see their lives through the lens or the vocabulary of the Gospel or not, they're ours, they're us, and it's saintly.

Today's Gospel of the Beatitudes - a collection of Jesus' memorable sayings and a veritable portrait of himself - shouts at us about saintliness. Sharing the lot and dispositions of the world's poor, being gentle with others and God's creation, who grieve because love costs, who fight for what's right - the nuts and bolts of goodness. When we show mercy, decency, strive for peace and reconciliation and put up with opposition and derision in the cause of doing right, you're on the ball.

Forget sickly images of holiness. Jesus lived it through his humanity and we do the same. It's an earthly, grounded and real journey, struggling worthily to love. This is our feast. Welcome home.



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From a cheerful and confident Pope Francis

One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses'. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents. While painfully aware of our own frailties, we have to march on without giving in, keeping in mind what the Lord said to Saint Paul 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9). Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victory banner borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil. The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds; it is the fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust.

The Christian ideal will always be a summons to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today's world imposes on us. Many try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel. For just as some people want a purely spiritual Christ, without flesh and without the cross, they also want their interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command. Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.

The Joy of the Gospel - paras 85 and 88