

All Saints, Eucharist

Daniel 7: 1-3, 15-18, Ephesians 1: 11-end and Luke 6: 20-31

Mother Emma

As the clocks change, the nights draw in, and we approach the end of the liturgical year, we are called to remember. At our All Souls' service this evening we shall be remembering the faithful departed, those whom we have loved and known, and who have passed ahead of us into the joy of God's heavenly kingdom.

In two weeks' time, we shall remember and honour those who died in the service of their country, and on the final day of the church's year, on Sunday 20th, we shall celebrate the feast of Christ the King, remembering his self-sacrificial love which opened the gates of heaven to us all.

But today, a day of great celebration for the Church, we commemorate all the saints who, as the hymn tells us, confessed Christ by faith before the world. But who exactly are the Saints we remember today, and whose examples we are called to follow?

The word "saint" itself simply means holy or sacred, and describes a person of holiness.

The Roman Catholic Church traditionally canonises particular people as Saints, who have fulfilled certain specific requirements, as apostles, martyrs, or workers of miracles. Traditional Anglican liturgy gives named saints' days only to people actually mentioned in the Bible: the apostles, the evangelists, St Michael and his Angels, St Stephen, whose martyrdom is described in the Acts of the Apostles, and a day to remember the Conversion of St Paul.

But it is clear from our epistle reading today, that St Paul himself used the term simply to mean all those who were made holy by their recognition of Christ as Lord, and their commitment to follow him. He uses that wonderful phrase "*with the eyes of your heart enlightened*", to describe those who have seen and received the light of Christ in their lives and glimpsed the eternal hope to which we have been called. He is drawing on a much more ancient tradition mentioned in our reading from Daniel, that:

The holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever – for ever and ever.'

As all of us who follow Christ are promised a share in that eternal kingdom, so, in Paul's words, we share together in the glorious inheritance of the saints.

So All Saints can be seen as a day to remember all those whom we believe lived holy lives – both the heroes and heroines of the past two thousand years of the Christian Church, and also those who may remain unsung and unnamed, but who have confessed Christ and served him in the world.

On every Saints' Day, including today, we grow in thankfulness as we reflect on and are encouraged and inspired by the examples of so many of Christ's followers, who have embodied his grace in different and unique ways.

Most of you will be aware that over the past year, we have been seeking to discern our priorities as a church and community for the next three years, as the Church of England encourages every parish to produce a Mission Action Plan. We have held seven open meetings to listen to members of all our different congregations, and the PCC has discussed the findings, the ideas, the hopes and the concerns which arose from these contributions, trying to hear God's call for St Mary Abbots for our immediate future. Our discussions drew us to three main topics: Welcome, Discipleship and Outreach. Almost all of the points raised, the areas which people particularly appreciated or felt could be made stronger, seemed to fall into one of these categories and we felt the Holy Spirit urging us to develop our parish life under God in these three ways.

Fr Christopher then distilled all the suggestions, hopes and ideas into a single document, and after a further PCC discussion, Leonora has transformed this into a beautiful booklet which we hope sums up the way we wish to travel between now and 2025, whilst capturing the essence of St Mary Abbots in its illustrations. Each of you will, this morning, have received a copy of our Mission Action Plan. We hope the booklet will clarify in more detail what it is that all those who took part put forward. Please do take it away with you and consider prayerfully the ways in which God might be calling you to action within the areas we have jointly identified.

This may be to take on an additional role in our worship; to offer yourself as a community volunteer; to pray for the individual elements of the roadmap we have created; to re-consider your giving and support for the church; to join us as we strive to deepen our understanding of our Christian faith; or simply to share with us in offering the warmest and most hospitable welcome we can to those who pass through our doors.

The feast of All Saints commemorates not only the familiar saints of Christianity since the Early Church, who may no longer have their own feast day in the Church of England, such as St Augustine or St Francis, but also the countless millions of faithful Christians who have served Christ in their own generation. It is a great celebration of the Church through the ages, a thanksgiving for the light of Christ, shining through the lives of his followers, and an expression of the unity of all God's people, living and departed, who will all come to share in the inheritance of the saints in glory.

We remember them all today, celebrating men and women in whose lives we have seen the grace of God powerfully at work, being encouraged by their example, and remembering that sanctity may grow in ordinary circumstances, as well as in extraordinary times of crisis. It is a wonderful feast on which to launch our new Mission Action Plan, as we pray that God will call each one of us to greater holiness and faithfulness within the community of the Church.

Perhaps as we try to follow Christ as a community together, we might embody Paul's words from our reading:

God has made Christ the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.