

St Luke's in the City

Celebrating at the Crossroads **All Saints Sunday, 4 November 2007**

Dear Friends,

WE believe in the 'communion of saints' – so we affirm in the Apostles' Creed. The Feast of All Saints (actually the 1st of November, but as a major feast of the Church celebrated on the nearest Sunday) marks a turning point in the liturgical year, as it heralds the wrapping-up of these reflections on 'liturgy, theology, church and mission'. After about five months of green-time Sundays after Pentecost, All Saints inevitably shifts our attention in the direction of Advent and the Feast of Incarnation. These rather mundane calendar facts alert us to a vital theological principal which underpins both the church's year and our feast today – namely, that Christian faith, as Karl Barth insisted, is thoroughly eschatological in character. The acclamation in the middle of the Great Thanksgiving Prayer which is prayed in most other parts of the English-speaking church, though sadly not here, recalls us to this fact every time we make eucharist – 'Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!' In the company of all the saints we are reminded that in Christ all time is united, the past and the future coincident in the present moment of grace.

'Saints' are that 'cloud of witnesses' who surround us and precede us, who intercede for us and who call us to live fully in the present. The Church has tended to use the word 'saints' in two distinct, though ultimately connected, ways – any Christian who is baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ; and those particular individuals who have signally manifested the Spirit of conforming to Christ. The extraordinary variety of those who the Church has called 'saints' warns against any rigidly-narrow idea of sainthood, and clearly affirms the comprehensiveness of human diversity. Nevertheless, the central characteristic of the saints is self-giving love, and the martyr remains the norm for sainthood – the Greek *μαρτυρος* *marturos* means 'witness'. The Church's witness as the community of saints is the authority to bless. Moreover, it is the authority to bless the whole community and to pray for the whole community's ultimate and final redemption. Clearly, when the church deems it fit to bless battleships and fighter-bombers but refuses to bless gay and lesbian people it has forfeited its authority and betrayed its witness. Self-giving love, to which countless saints witness, is the Church's only true authority.

It should be clear that All Saints is not an occasion for sentimental nostalgia for the past. This is not the Church's 'memorial day', just another historical commemoration such as is made for the fallen dead, or any other human accomplishment. All Saints is not a human accomplishment, but the accomplishment of God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit. All Saints, wrote John Macquarrie, is the affirmation that "the Church commits itself to a future in which it must lose itself in order to transcend itself and become the Kingdom of God." We believe in the 'communion of saints' as those witness to, and call us to, this loss of self in Christ.

With my love,
David