

## All Saints Day 2020

1 I sing a song of the saints of God,  
patient and brave and true,  
who toiled and fought and lived and died  
for the Lord they loved and knew.  
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,  
and one was a shepherdess on the green:  
they were all of them saints of God, and I mean,  
God helping, to be one too.

All Saints Day. Do you remember a couple of years ago I preached on our patronal festival and I introduced you to some rather obscure saints? St Luke is the patron saint of physicians and surgeons. Did you also know that he is also the patron saint of bachelors, bookbinders, brewers, butchers, glassmakers, glass workers, gold workers, goldsmiths, lace-makers, lace workers, notaries, sculptors and stained glass workers.

Did you know that different medical specialties have their own patron saints? St. Liborius is the patron saint of urology and St. Marina of nephrology; both have miraculous treatment of kidney stones on their c.v.'s. St. Michael looks after radiology, perhaps because of a heavenly light he radiated; it's hard, though, to pin down a saint such as Michael who also looks after paratroopers and grocers. Infectious disease specialists may turn to saints Sebastian or Roch, struck down by plague. St. Apollonia has an understandable attention to dentists and their patients, as all her teeth were knocked out.

Looking after nurses are saints Agatha, Camillus de Lellis, and John of God. Italian nurses can turn to Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena, and in Peru, nurses have the option of praying to St. Rose of Lima.

It seems that no part of the body is so well protected against disease as the breasts: one review found 13 saints who have claims to guarding against breast diseases. The best known is St. Agatha, who according to one legend was martyred by having her breasts cut off. The most obscure is St. Mamas, a shepherd, who seems to have drawn the assignment for no reason other than his name

One of the most unpleasant saints on the Catholic calendar seems to have drawn one of the most unpleasant assignments. St. Fiacre, who also lent his name to the French word for taxi, was a misogynist who

refused to allow women into his chapel. According to legend, a Parisian lady who dared enter his oratory was struck senseless on the spot. She seems to have got revenge, since Fiacre is the saint to call on for venereal disease and hemorrhoids.

Well all these folk and thousands more we celebrate today. All Saints' is a day saturated with meaning. It is a day saturated with stories, begging to be dusted off, read and reread. These stories are full of curious and complex characters who have been blinded or startled or warmed or provoked by God's grace. They are gifts from God to us, beacons that light the way. Their dispositions may be cranky or caring. And yet, for all their diversity, these characters are part of a community, embraced, confirmed and strengthened by God's love. And we pray - 'since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses'..

Over the centuries, the church has identified the lives of the saints as tangible expressions of the beatitudes, of people who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are brave enough to challenge all that is unlovely, who pursue peace with justice. And so, it makes sense that our gospel text on this All Saints' Day is from the first part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes.

Now Martin Luther saw the beatitudes as a measuring stick of sin, revealing just how far each of us fall short of God's glory, and how Jesus exemplifies what is completely beyond us, what love really looks like in human form. Not only Luther there are others who have emphasized the almost-infinite distance between these new laws/admonitions of Jesus and us who are to be shaped by them.

While many have lamented the beatitudes as too heavenly to be of any earthly good, there are others who have seen them as Jesus' answer to the question of what constitutes human fulfillment. Jesus is offering us the beatitudes as the way to fullness of life. To truly flourish as a human being, to enjoy abundant life, here is the pathway. This is what love looks like in daily action. These are aspirational maxims. So rather than seeing the beatitudes as moral obligations, we could see them as signposts to fullness of life. .

Here are the things that will make you fully alive, Jesus says. Take them in. Let them instill hope and enliven and direct your steps, as they have done for countless before you. Trust that the Holy Spirit will guide you on the way. This is precisely what we see over and over in the lives of the saints. We see individuals in their humanity who sought the narrow path of poverty, meekness, mercy, and purity. And we name them as

champions of the faith, opening up this well-worn, narrow way in the forest of all that denies life and love, doubt and uncertainty.

The saints are those for whom God's love has seeped into the cracks and crevices of the human condition to encourage new ways of seeing themselves and the world and God. Telling the saints' stories reminds us of how God has worked with and will continue to work with generation after generation in the church for the fulfilling and realisation of what it means to be human, to be fully alive.

I wonder if this is true for you as it is for me. Every now and then someone whom we think is special comes into our lives. It may be a new friend who is with us for a time, then moves on. It may be a special teacher, a doctor, an anonymous helper on the road, a beloved, a priest or counsellor, a kaumatua... These are people who stand out in our memories as ones who were there when we needed them. These people are maybe saints for you and for. And it may be that at some time in your life and mine, we have been as saints to others, to those we have reached out to serve as servants of the living God of love. Saints are everywhere, working for the Kingdom of God, and I sure that some of them are here.

So today, join in the celebration of the saints.. Rejoice in naming them and honouring those whom we know not by name. Most of all, pray that God will enable some of their glory and goodness to seep into us and ask that, God helping, we might be one too

3 They lived not only in ages past;  
there are hundreds of thousands still;  
the world is bright with the joyous saints  
who love to do Jesus' will.  
You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,  
in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;  
for the saints of God are just folk like me,  
and I mean to be one too.

