

Last Thursday night I answered the door to four bright young faces demanding ‘Trick or treat!’ As I watched them heading back to the gate to rejoin their parents I heard the sound of the first of the night’s firework displays. It was of course Halloween, All Hallows Eve, the eve of All Saints.

I suppose the title Saint tends to have a bit of a celebrity tag to it. The festival of All Saints for me draws us back to the original New Testament understanding of what it is to be a saint.

In the passage from Ephesians that is set as our second reading this morning, the writer tells his reader:

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and
your love for all the saints

We are talking here of a community of faith that has at its heart a shared faith and a commitment to each other, a communion, a fellowship of saints.

In the Apostles Creed we confess

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,

A community transcending barriers of time and culture.

So one of the marks of the Communion of Saints, and by definition any Christian community such as this Parish of which we are members, is one of **INCLUSION**. This is very much one of the underlying themes of the passage we read from Isaiah as our Old Testament Lesson, in which the prophet speaks of the faithful foreigner and eunuch, those who would have been seen on the

margins, on the edge; these will take their place on the holy mountain, the Temple, the altar of a restored Jerusalem.

We will now take this theme of inclusion, those on the margins into our reflection on the Gospel passage appointed for today, Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke's account differs from Matthew in that he includes not just a series of blessings but also a series of woes on those who would have been seen as very much part of the Establishment. As we read it we pick up themes of the Magnificat, which I have printed alongside our Gospel reading, with its talk of filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich empty away.

The teaching is delivered to the disciples in the hearing of the crowd. So in a sense we are invited to listen in. Like the Magnificat, Jesus' teaching represents a reversal of values

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
²¹‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.
‘Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

The saints are called to the margins, to identify with the poor, the hungry; to go with Jesus as he touches the leper, shares table with the tax collector and the sinner, allows the sinful woman to wash his feet with her tears and dry them with her hair.

In so doing he causes offence. That has always been the lot of the prophet, the one who stood in the places of power and spoke unwelcome truth, be it William Wilberforce campaigning against slavery in Victorian England; Martin Luther King in the Southern States of America in the 1960's or Desmond Tutu in South Africa. They all went to the margins, they all caused offence in the pursuit of justice and truth as they worked out their vocation to be saints of God in the world in which they lived.

So another mark of the Church, as part of the communion of saints, must be **SOLIDARITY**. The Church, as individuals and as a community, must be prepared to go to the margins, into the prisons, the drug therapy units, the shelters for the homeless; to be with people who are lonely, who are ignored by the world as it rushes past so busy in its busyness.

Inclusion, Solidarity. Jesus invites us further down a path of radical, transforming love.

²⁷But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Inclusion can have an element of the clique; solidarity with the suffering can all too easily be tinged with condescension. The radical, transforming love Jesus is calling his followers to follow will have none of this. 'But I say to you that listen ..', you that are open; open to Christ, open to others, open even to those who would take advantage of us. 'Love your enemies, do good to those

who hate you.’ That is to go beyond an interior feeling. That love must encounter the one who is being loved. ‘Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.’ That encounter must go beyond mere words into positive action; ‘If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also’; action that opens up possibilities of new beginnings. What we are talking of here is a third mark of the Church as part of the communion of saints, that of **RECONCILIATION**. Reconciliation must always be at the heart of the life of the Church. Reconciliation between man and God, as we bear witness to the dying and rising Christ at the heart of our faith, who speaks into our brokenness words of forgiveness and peace. As a reconciled people, we are called to be instruments of reconciliation in a broken and hurting world.

We are called to be saints, part of the communion of saints, transcending barriers of culture and time; in our fellowship with one another welcoming and honouring one another. As saints of God, we are called to reach out in solidarity with those who are hurting, those on the margins; we are called to be instruments of peace in a broken and divided world.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen
Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi