

1 John 3: 1-3, Matthew 5: 1-12 - All Saints Day - St Peter's, Formby - 02/11/2017.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O lord, our Strength and Redeemer.

Reverend Joy Carroll, the inspiration for *Geraldine Grainger* in the Vicar of Dibley, once said that the reason she decided to become a vicar because she read the Sermon on the Mount (which includes the Beatitudes). It is quoted by *Geraldine* in the episode about Songs of Praise.

And in the darkest grip of depression, another TV vicar, Adam Smallbone (played by Tom Hollander) in *Rev.* - whose equally human frailties are laid bare before our eyes - lies with the blanket over his head, having not moved for days, whispering these words to himself.

I could have said something profound like 'we need these fictional characters to portray our deepest highs and lows' - but then I watched Richard Coles on *Strictly*, which shattered that argument!

Both of these people, though fictional, depict, in their mishaps and slapstick, a genuine righteousness. A genuine NESS. Something that makes them stick in the mind and that inspires the heart.

And thus my sermon-y thoughts this week were two-fold. (1) the clear inspirational quality of All the Saints who we celebrate

today, and (2) On the clear inspirational quality of the Beatitudes - which make up our text today.

All Christians are saints. We included (if you hadn't come to church particularly expecting a celebration - think again. This one is for all of you - bedecked in your honour). We may think that we are not very good ones (or I could just be speaking to myself), but we are. By virtue of the faith that we hold in Jesus, we are numbered among the saints. Right here and now.

And, as is this All Saints, we think about those who have inspired us in our journey of faith. Those Saints who are departed, or who don't have a day dedicated to them. All of those who do their quiet and inspirational work on the margins and out of sight. I can imagine we can all think of one person in that regard. Someone in whom the example of their life that shows us something of the full mystery and majesty of God. Someone who did one action that gave you a glimpse of the magnitude of God's love.

During our Eucharistic prayer, when we join our worship this morning with angels, archangels, and all of the whole of heaven - think of those inspirational people then, and give thanks for those who are in his nearer presence.

For although it is one of the oddest concepts in Christian thought in today's world - the thought that in God, we are not separated from those that have gone before us - it is also one of the most comforting.

This idea is perhaps, in the eyes of many in our world, antiquated and can seem quite far-fetched. But it might also be what G.K. Chesterton would say is: 'Truth standing on her head to get attention'.

Our gospel reading this morning gives us part of a manifesto about how to be saints. And because, as I've said, that includes all of the church, then it also forms an important part of our Christian life. And in it, we read about Jesus going up a mountain to get attention to talk about what kind of things make people saintly.

Each of them is connected to the other, and, because Jesus (of all people) knows what it is to be truly human - he speaks these words to us.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is challenging, because Jesus talks of an inner poverty - the one who relies and trusts in God to win through.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Jesus is right to pick up on this - grieving (for a person or a situation) holds some of our deepest anguish. But it can also produce our greatest motivations and determinations.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Surely a contradiction in terms? But meekness, or humility, Jesus models to us by even being on earth - and by giving himself on the cross for us.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The effort and time invested in an good endeavour is not wasted.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Jesus makes a virtue of showing kindness to those in distress. An example might be our 'Keystone' Dementia Support Group, for example. Kindness shown, will be reciprocated.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

The pure in heart is to love. Without excusing the foibles, but to love them anyway, as God sees us.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven and Blessed are you when people insult you because of me. Rejoice, for great is your reward in heaven.

From 'goody two-shoes' to imprisonment. Jesus says, good. They notice something different. Something that pushes them to strive for the good they envisage for all. These is the building blocks of the kingdom.

All of these characteristics, I would venture to suggest, will appear in some form of the people that we hold up as our personal saints. Jesus went up a mountain to teach, but today - and this week - as we think about those quiet saints that we know, or that we have been inspired by in the past, we just need to take our bulletins away.

Take them with you, and, in a spare moment, just reflect on this reading and see what strikes you. Perhaps have a think about why it inspires you, and who gave you clear example of it. And then, try to show this to those around you - as we grow, together, even more into our maturity as living saints of God.

Amen.