

Sermon on All Saints Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2017 by Revd Canon David Hodgson at All Saints Church Wokingham

One of the things that we celebrate on All Saints Day is our membership of a body, a family, a fellowship, a company, a crowd, a great wonderful multitude of people which includes the saints in heaven, apostles, martyrs and other righteous and holy people of all times; whom God is with always. We take the opportunity on All Saints Day to celebrate the honest goodness which God has inspired in the lives of Christian people through the ages. We delight on this festival day to be part of this body of Christ. It includes so many people of wonderful example who reflect Christ to us in all their various cultural and life situations down the ages. There are enough of them for each of us to have our favourites - saints who've faithfully followed the Lord Jesus through troubles and joys like our own. We can have Christian friends on both sides of death. You might find inspiration for your Christian faith in famous saints like St Francis of Assisi, or, it might be in people you have known in your own lives. People whose goodness and Christlike lives have inspired your own discipleship. Maybe it was someone who helped your faith to grow; or someone showed you God's presence by their actions or their words. Today we thank God for those people.

The second thing I like to affirm on All Saints Day is this. We are all saints. Together we are saints. That was the original New Testament use of the phrase "communion of saints" "all of the saints" meant the community of believers. We are all "saints without haloes" if you like. Believers who still have our failings and sins, but we have heard God's call in Christ. We have decided to turn away from sin; and to try each and every day to be followers, and learners of Christ. We want to place ourselves in God's service and we want to let God rule in our hearts our minds and our actions.

We have to be honest and say that we fail often and in fact we are full of sin. It's a fact we are not holy: we are not of ourselves holy as saints. But we also affirm a true All Saints Day kind of honesty when we say that we are saints too. We must never forget that we are holy in promise; and the promise is God's which cannot fail. So really to seek and to desire holiness is to be holy already in Christ - from God's perspective we are saints now and what could be more honest than that.

But let me tell you what makes us saints: it is God's forgiveness of our sins that makes us saints. Jesus' message and his work were: God forgives us totally and calls us into a new beginning -an inner radical conversion -a homecoming of our whole person to God - to be true and honest to ourselves as God's holy ones; as we were created in love to be- called to a life lived for fellow human beings - and called also to pass on to others that forgiveness which we have received. It is

that sharing of God's forgiveness with others that really makes saints visible: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you.... Do to others as you would have them do to you.

And finally let me drive a point home which is important because this is also about being God's saints. It is not our morality which makes us holy. We are not saints because we are good or better than others. That is moralism, not faith: and the gospel is not moralism. That much may be obvious but also I think there is a subtle form of moralism which I'm afraid has infected both the contemporary church and our culture. It's not easy or comfortable to believe in God and the saints in today's world. And so maybe because of that we can fall prey to the half-conscious feeling that somehow it is a moral achievement to believe in God. It can feel like an achievement to believe and trust in God in the face of our own and others suffering in a godless world. And in an often heartless society we can also get a feeling of moral achievement from empathising with the suffering of others.

But it is not our effort of believing, nor our effort of suffering to maintain our beliefs, nor our suffering with others because of our beliefs that brings our healing or gives us our hope - none of that makes us the saints that we are in truth - it is God alone through Jesus, and the grace of God on which we rely, who makes us who we are by promise - all saints.

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