

READING: Ephesians 1.11-23

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL READING: Luke 6.20-31

Alleluia.

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

Alleluia.

Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

'Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

'Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

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

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Alleluia.**

All Saints 2025

There was an uncanny coincidence last week. If you were with us at the 10am Eucharist you will have heard Kirstine preach and start her sermon with an account of being enthralled by Fr Michael telling her the story of his discovery of a field of leprechauns playing and having a whale of a time.

I got home to read my Sunday newspaper and on page 17 of the Observer I find an article recounting how academics from three leading universities had investigated the extent of belief in folklore in England. It appears that custom and folklore are widespread in England except in the East Midlands which according to Dr David Clarke, the lead professor, is 'a folklore free zone'. Clearly the academics haven't been to Fr Michael's garden!

So what are we to make of this season in the church's calendar?

We are at that time of year when the old religion with roots deep in pre-Christian culture meets the modern world and rubs up against our Christian faith. In the church we're not so keen on the Halloween tradition of dressing up, spiders and cobwebs, but we do recognise all hallows eve and today in this Eucharist we remember all the saints who have gone before us in the faith of Christ. Tonight we shall gather to pray for those whom we loved and have died, and we shall do so again at the Eucharist on Wednesday.

This morning I want to us to think about the saints and their place in our Christian faith.

This is not as easy as you might think. There are many points of view.

We're an inclusive church. There are those of you here from a catholic, Roman Catholic background who will find the veneration of the saints a natural part of your spirituality; who will find making intercession through the saints a natural part of your prayer life. For some Christians it is obvious that there are those who should be given recognition for their deep piety, their profound spirituality, their holy example and who by their intercession have wrought miracles. The latest is an Italian teenager, Carlo Acutis, who used his internet skills to promote the Christian faith. His life was cut short, but in the few years he had on earth his motto was : to always be close to Jesus. That was his life's plan, to always be close to Jesus. He was canonized, made an official saint, on 7th September by Pope Leo.

We're an inclusive church. There are those of you here this morning who come from a more non-conformist background; from evangelical, charismatic churches or from a more protestant tradition. In that tradition it is taught that all may achieve some degree of perfection, sanctification, that all are made holy by God the Father, through the sacrifice of his Son and the working of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life. We are all

saints because we are all sanctified – and while we might look back to the example of those who have gone before us – they are no better than we are.

We are an inclusive church. There are those here this morning who come from an Orthodox background (capital O) – and they are much more relaxed, straightforward and less formal in their approach to the saints. In the same vein as our Catholic brothers and sisters but less dogmatic.

We are an inclusive church. Some of us are Anglicans!

We are an inclusive church and however you are incorporating saints into your spiritual life you have a place here.

Unfortunately the foundational articles of Anglican faith, the 39 Articles of the old Book of Common Prayer, suggest that the worship, adoration or invoking of saints is a fond thing, vainly invented and grounded upon no warranty of scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God. That's put us in our place – except that that was written in 1562 and the world has moved on, theology has moved on, the practice of our faith has moved on. You have to find what is right for you – here and now.

I wonder what the founding fathers of the Anglican Church would have made of my friend Jan Shuttleworth, now with the Saints in glory, who insisted on praying to St Anthony of Padua in Portuguese if ever she lost anything. She claims the lost things always turned up!

Scripture says that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. That is truer than you think, because you are surrounded by a great cloud of saints. If saints are those who let the light of God shine through them then these stained-glass windows give you a great cloud of witnesses – if you count the wood and stone statuary as well as the glass there are 47 identifiable saints here in church.

These are those who our catholic friends have properly recognised as being special people in the Kingdom of God – Saints. Proper saints whose lives you would find recorded in a book.

But it gets better because you are here in church surrounded by another crowd of saints. If we take the Protestant idea of sanctification, being made holy, being made saints seriously then we are all saints. We are all on this journey together – and you are seated this morning with 100 other saints. When we come to share the peace, when we get our coffee, when we talk to the people we know, we do it with fellow saints – when we don't talk to people in church we also choose not to interact with fellow saints.

Can we use this word saint interchangeably? It would be good if we could because our worship is offered with those who have gone before us on the journey of faith. When

we offer the Eucharist it is done with the angels, archangels and all the company of heaven, with Mary, John the Baptist and all the saints. With them we praise and glorify God for ever. We do this because although we are many we are one body because we all share one bread.

The Church triumphant in heaven, the Church militant here on earth is made up of everyone who has joined John Bunyan on the Pilgrim's Progress to the Celestial City

For the sake of clarity I think it would be easier to keep the word saint for the people in the windows and the statues – but for the sake of demonstrating the Church as a real fellowship of all believers I would like you to have in your head the idea that the people who are here with you this morning are saints as well.