## All Saints' Day

## *Saints Are People the Sun Shines Through*

*Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12*

When I was young, I thought saints were people with stained-glass windows in their honour. They seemed altogether different from the rest of us: holier, braver, closer to God than ordinary Christians could ever hope to be. Over the years, my understanding has changed.

When I hear the word *saint* now, I think less about stained glass and more about ordinary people. I think of parishioners whose funerals I've taken over the years: people who worried about their families, endured grief and illness, wrestled with doubts, and navigated the challenges of everyday life. Most would never have imagined that anyone might call them saints. Yet through them, often in ways they never recognised, the love of God became visible.

Sainthood isn't reserved for a select few. To be baptised is to be called to sainthood. A saint is not someone who has achieved spiritual perfection, but someone who allows God's grace and love to find room within their life. Saints are living reminders of God's light in the world.

I'm reminded of a story about a church whose nave was lined with stained-glass windows depicting saints from across the centuries. A mother was explaining them to her young son, pointing out the various figures and telling him they were saints. The little boy thought for a moment and then said, "Oh, I get it. Saints are people that the sun shines through."

Today we honour not only the great saints of history, but also countless believers whose names are known only to God. In their own way, each reflected Christ's light into the world.

That is what today's readings are about. Together they answer three questions: Who are we? What is our future? And how are we called to live in the meantime?

The answer to the first question begins not with our achievements but with God's love. That is where John begins in our second reading:

> "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are."

Notice those last words: "That is what we are." Not, "That is what we might become if we try hard enough." Not, "That is what the especially holy people are." But, "That is what we are."

The starting point of the Christian life is not our achievement but God's love. Before we do anything for God, we already belong to God.

And John reminds us that God is not finished with us:

> "What we will be has not yet been revealed."

Most of us know our limitations only too well. But God sees more than we see. God sees who we are becoming.

John assures us that one day:

> "We will be like Christ."

That is our destiny. Not merely life after death, but transformation now into the likeness of Jesus. The completion of everything God has been patiently doing within us throughout our lives.

John's words invite us to lift our eyes beyond the present moment. If we are God's children now, and if God's work in us is still unfinished, what does that future look like?

The Book of Revelation offers a glimpse. Not a detailed map of heaven, but a window into God's promised future. John sees:

> "A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages."

What a magnificent picture: the Church as God sees it, one vast family gathered before the throne. Different cultures, languages, and centuries, yet all united in the worship of God.

Whenever I hear that passage, I find myself picturing familiar faces among that multitude. faithful parishioners; family members who first nurtured our faith; friends whose absence we still feel; and those who, in years gone by, served God and God's people with quiet devotion and steadfast love.

Their earthly journey is complete, yet they remain part of the communion of saints. They raised families, served others, carried grief and disappointment, and loved as best they could.

In God's kingdom, nothing given in love is ever lost. No prayer is wasted, no act of mercy forgotten, no faithfulness unnoticed.

It’s a beautiful vision. But it also leaves us with a practical question. If that is where God is leading us, how are we to live while we are still on the journey?

That’s the question Jesus answers in the Gospel.

If Revelation shows us our destination, and 1 John reveals our identity, then the Beatitudes show us how we are to live between here and there. If you want to know what a child of God looks like in practice, look at the Beatitudes.

Picture the scene. Jesus sits on a hillside looking out at people carrying the burdens and hopes of everyday life, people like us. And he begins to describe what true blessing looks like.

The world says, "Blessed are the rich, the powerful, the successful." Jesus says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Blessed are those who know they need God.

The world says, "Don't let anyone see your weakness. Keep moving. Carry on." Jesus says: "Blessed are those who mourn."
The world says, "Look after yourself first." Jesus says: "Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are the merciful." "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Everything is turned upside down. Or perhaps, from God's perspective, it is the world that has been upside down all along.

Jesus is not giving us a checklist for earning God's favour. The Beatitudes are not entrance requirements for the kingdom. Rather, they describe what happens when God's kingdom takes root in a person's life. They are the family likeness of God's children.

And when I look back over the years of ministry, these are precisely the qualities I have seen in the saints I have known. What I remember is not perfection, power, or success, but mercy, gentleness, and faithfulness.

I think of a parishioner who quietly cared for others without seeking recognition. After her death, story after story emerged: meals delivered, visits made, encouragement offered, small acts that changed people's lives. She never thought of herself as a saint. Most saints do not. Yet the light of Christ shone through her.

I suspect many of us could name similar people who taught us what faith looks like, not so much by their words as by their lives.

It reminds us that holiness is rarely spectacular. More often it is quiet, hidden, and woven into the fabric of everyday life. It grows through prayer and patience, kindness and forgiveness, through countless acts of love that may never attract attention but are never unnoticed by God.

Today we give thanks for those who have gone before us. Some are remembered throughout the Church; others only by family and friends. Yet all belong to that great communion of saints whose lives continue to bear witness to Christ.

But All Saints' Day is not only about remembering them. It is also about recognising our own calling.

We too are God's beloved children. We too are being shaped into the likeness of Christ. We too are called to let God's light shine through the fragile stained glass of our lives.

For that is God's purpose for every baptised life. And one day, by God's grace, we too shall join that great multitude that no one can count, gathered around the throne of God.

Until then, may we live in such a way that others catch glimpses of Christ through us. For in the end, that little boy understood more than he knew: Saints are people that the sun shines through.

May we live in Christ's light, and one day share in its fullness with all the saints in glory. Amen.

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