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Dear Friends

*Revelation 7 v 9-17    1 John 3 v 1-3    Matthew 5 V 1-12*

All Saints day - Blessed are the poor in spirit

Following the news that we were to go into lockdown again, I decided I would try to be more productive with my time. As many of you will know, I have inherited a rather large garden and, not being a gardener, this was going to be a challenge indeed! So, on the Friday morning (the day for lockdown at 6pm), I had a team of young men come to the Rectory and clear the rather overgrown area in preparation for the two weeks of lockdown so I could work on the garden. But, alas, it was not to be. The weather has meant it has been a total wash out! In fact, you may, like me, think the garden looks worse in its current state – but I was reminded by one of the young men that generally gardens have to get worse before they get better; I do hope so!



But, as I gaze out from my study on the sparse looking area and I reflect on this space, I see the leaves falling and I am reminded of the rhythm of the seasons and, as we approach Kingdom Season, I come to think about All Saints Day. I cannot help but think of the saints that have gone before us, those who have stripped away all the unwanted weeds and clutter from their lives in order to leave space for God. I have heard many say that lockdown has made us reevaluate our lives, and I wonder how many of us have taken that opportunity to strip away all the unwanted thoughts and burdens?

All Saints begins on All Hallows eve and is found in the Samhain Celtic festival which marks the end of harvest and onset of winter. It is a time when the Church recalls the examples, witness and prayers of the holy men and women identified by the church as saints. Many of us think about the saints as those who lived a life of holiness and perfection, but when you read about the saints you soon come to see that many lives weren't always perfect; but what they did was live a life "poor in spirit" and, if you think about it, so did Christ.

I am reminded here of the words from the Pope who said the saints are not perfect models but they are people who lived their lives where God had crossed their paths.

The poor in spirit have made a space for God. This enables them to weep with those who weep, and show mercy because they recognise that they have received mercy. I am a great believer that the more you give the more you receive and I mean that in its broadest sense.

The beatitudes reveal to us that we are truly blessed when we come to know our dependence on God and on each other. Those who are poor in spirit are those who are aware of their own fragility and how much they need God's Grace, and it is these qualities which enabled the saints to be saints, and In a way it can enable us to be saints as well.



The beatitudes are expressed in a positive way as an attitude. If you like, they give us a map or a compass to help us navigate and direct our lives. It's a type of framework for Christian living. This doesn't mean that it has nothing to do with the Law (Torah). In fact, Christ is showing us that there is an organic relationship between the Law and his teachings for he came to fulfil it, not to abolish it! This is like a movement from Rules to developing an attitude. In fact, it is about adopting a beautiful attitude.

The beatitudes are not a list of entry requirements; they are actions that will be rewarded. It is about our behaviour now, whilst also acknowledging our suffering and, by embracing this first beatitude (blessed are the poor in spirit), it provides an anchor point which enables all the others to flow freely.

We are told that those who are poor in spirit will come to know the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom which isn't a distant place but describes a society that can exist when all people adopt these beautiful attitudes; where truth, love, compassion, justice, peace and freedom reign.

Speaking of adoption, St John's letter reminds us that we are adopted children of God, children who may also be poor in spirit. It reminds us that we are not self-made people; the saints are the people who have responded generously to God's love and the completion of that love will be in the life to come. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit which will help us become of this family, part of the communion of saints.

St John's revelation is a bit like marmite really, but what it does is reveal that the saints are marked with a seal (mentioned in the book of Ezekiel) where the Hebrew letter tau or t is set upon their heads. Remind you of anything? Baptism and confirmation perhaps? Here St John reveals a great multitude of heaven, a place of inclusion where people from all nations will come together.

I find it reassuring to know we have these prayer buddies in the communion of saints and I also find it reassuring to know that there are saints all around us.

Today, I have returned from officiating at a funeral. The person departed not only lived her life for her family, she also adopted a child aged two and became a mother to this child giving stability guidance and love.

I think of the woman I cared for in pregnancy who developed an aggressive form of cancer just as her pregnancy was confirmed. She continued her pregnancy knowing that the delay in treatment would shorten her life; she already had two children and a husband to consider. She died a week after her daughter was born, but I witnessed this woman's bravery and care as she tried to prepare those whom she loved for her death.

I think of those who experience abuse in all its forms but have escaped the situation, become liberated from the damaging thought processes and physical harm they endured, and have gone on to dedicate their lives to helping others to rebuild their lives.

You see there are many saints all around us, just like these I have mentioned who show courage in the face of ill health and death, and those who fight for the rights of others. I am sure if you think about it you can identify them as well. So today, on this All Saints day, we remember and give thanks for exactly that – ALL saints!

**Love in Christ**

**Belinda**