

All Saints' Sunday

Collect: God of holiness, your glory is proclaimed in every age and in many ways: as today we rejoice in the faith of your saints, inspire us to follow their example with courage, wisdom and intention in the bringing in of your kingdom of deeper love and widening hope: through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Psalm 34 v1-4:

- ¹ I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
² My soul shall glory in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.
³ O magnify the Lord with me;
let us exalt his name together.
⁴ I sought the Lord and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

1 John 3 v1-3: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Matthew 5.1-12: When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

- ³ 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
⁴ 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
⁵ 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
⁶ 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
⁷ 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
⁸ 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
⁹ 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
¹⁰ 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
¹¹ 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Reflection: During the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth many people lived under a religious regime where the letter of the religious law was used in such a way as to make a person feel bad about themselves and never to feel good about themselves, that left a person to carry heavily the guilt of mistakes made by themselves or others, of human sin, their own and that of others and never to feel that they could move on from this. This was not what the temple rituals of Judaism were about or how the Law was intended but it was the way at the time of Jesus. By contrast Jesus' death on the cross, a place of shame, gives us much to consider about the coming through from both of shame and guilt, that which we feel and that which others have left us to feel.

To this end during his lifetime Jesus told parables to challenge the religious leaders about how far away they were through their practices, teaching and way of living from showing and enabling God's love to come through and for people to live with hope.

In all of these situations, as we have heard in the Gospel passages read in recent weeks, Jesus tried to open up a dialogue with the religious leaders. And he told the people parables of grace so as to nurture the faith of the people who were increasingly in large numbers coming to listen to him. In these parables he opened up for them a better, more hopeful and more joyful way for people to live, to live out God's wisdom and to love the world as God does, to bring in God's kingdom. But I think that it is Jesus' teaching of the Beatitudes that make the biggest difference!

When Jesus begins to explain, he says to the crowd this is what the Law says, but I say blind obedience to hypocritical law enforcers is not the way to live or to understand God's love. Instead, think more deeply about how you do make decisions and what shapes your life and consider more widely the insights I share with you about how God loves.

There are many contemporary versions of the Beatitudes that try to help us to hear and reflect on them in a way that speaks to the age in which we live. The intention of their teaching was given a particular context in Liberation theology with a commitment to the making a priority for the poor the focus of Christian living. To take these teachings of Jesus and to give them meaning so as to be able to say to the poor, the broken, "God Loves You" and for that person to believe the truth of what that means for themselves. The church then to be a community engaged fully in working with likeminded others in releasing people from burdens of poverty and discrimination, finding ways for people to engage in work and for the fulfilment of human potential.

And at the same time, connecting peoples' daily lives with the living world and helping an inner faith to grow that makes a difference to how a person lives and loves. The Beatitudes as a wisdom concept that in living in this way a person has fullness of life. We might helpfully think of the phrase "blessed are you" as meaning "You are filled with life".

The beatitudes are deeply relational, not instructions or prohibitions. They are to be lived out and they are non-violent. They help us understand God's wisdom better and grow our inner resilience in the face of aggression, humiliation and discrimination.

I think the recent releasing of a film about Pope Francis talking positively about same sex relationships and the valuing of civil partnerships is also relevant as we reflect on the Beatitudes. The film largely reflects his teaching when he was an Archbishop in Argentina and demonstrates a long-term commitment to taking a lead in opening up in a relational way issues of morality and justice that are affecting peoples' lives. He does this recognising that many within his own faith and in other faith communities will take a different view.

Pope Francis is saying that all human relationships, including same sex relationships, can reflect that each person is created in God's image: that we are all children of God and loved by God in our diversity of backgrounds, in our diversity of orientation, in the lives we have, in all that makes us who we are. And that this diversity is God's gift.

His words also remind us that, in many countries, living and being in same sex relationships is criminalised and, in some countries, this brings a death sentence.

And the Pope's words seem to me also to reflect Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes: of the bringing fully into community those who have been rejected, including those rejected because of their sexual orientation, those who may have been excluded by family and from community.

And because this rejecting has included by church communities, he challenges Christians to be wider in their vision and more open in understanding human relationships.