**Sermon – St Anne's Leicester – 2nd November 2025 – All Saints' Day**

*Ephesians 1:11-end; Luke 6:20-31*

*May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.*

First of all, I would like to express my thanks to Liz for inviting me to preside and preach here at St Anne's, where I spent my first very happy ten years living in the vicarage. It is twenty-one years since I was last here and there may not be anyone here who remembers my father Canon Platt when he was the vicar here. Today we are keeping All Saints' Day, transferred from yesterday. Hence our readings and especially our Gospel reading. What are we to imply as the connection between Luke's version of the Beatitudes and All Saints' Day? I would like to suggest three things. First that this reversal of usual assessments of worldly values is characteristic of the teaching of Jesus. Second, that many of the saints whose days we remember throughout the Christian year were those who lived by this teaching. Third, that the dead can teach us how to live.

First, the Beatitudes, which come quite near the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Just before our passage, we are told that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray and spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles. Then he came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples and a multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and be healed of their diseases. In the verses just preceding our passage, we are told that all in the crowd were trying to touch him for power came out of him and healed all of them. Then he looked up at his disciples and began: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.' Also blessed are the hungry, those who weep and those who are reviled on account of the Son of Man. Note that this teaching was aimed at his new group of disciples, so that Jesus was setting ground rules of his view of what the kingdom might look like. This Gospel for those who mourn is particularly relevant for this time of remembrance of those whom we have lost. Also, a warning about the price of following this teaching. Those who are persecuted for their faith and those who are bullied for trying to lead the good life are also to be given special spiritual reward. So much of this teaching reminds us of the words of the Magnificat routinely part of our Evening Prayer and with some wonderful musical settings. The Beatitudes, a foundational text, has often been reflected on. As an aside, the

composer Howard Goodall, well known for his setting of Psalm 23, the theme tune of the Vicar of Dibley, was in 2009 the composer in residence of Classic FM. For this he was required to compose a piece of music for each month of the year. He chose to write modern chant settings for the Beatitudes as described in Matthew's Gospel, and as there are only eight Beatitudes, he added four more, two either side of the biblical ones. These beatitudes are for those that are cared for, those that care for others, those who are lonely and those who are stateless. These seem to fit in with the topsy turvy ethics and values of the kingdom of God. If you think it was rather cheeky of Goodall to think he could add to the Beatitudes, then he is in good company.

In 2016 Pope Francis suggested six 'new' Beatitudes. These are: Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others, and forgive them from their heart. Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalised, and show them their closeness. Blessed are those who see God in every person, and strive to make others also discover him. Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home. Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others. Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion among Christians.

The Beatitudes offer a model for life as a follower of Jesus. Many of those whom we know of as saints have tried to live according to these guidelines. You may have your own favourite saints. Among mine are St Francis, St Clare, and two musical saints, St Cecilia and St Hildegard of Bingen. Yet as the core of the Gospel is love, the Beatitudes indicate that true happiness – blessedness – lies not in prestige and acclaim, nor riches, nor multiplicity of possessions. Saints are those who try to live according to the unifying, restoring power of love, unassuming holy people who make visible the Kingdom of God.

My third connection between our Gospel reading and today's celebration of all saints is that the dead can teach us how to live. The Reverend Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James' Piccadilly, has said that the Feast of All Saints is 'the honouring of the ones who have gone before us. And the acknowledgement that we who are living shape the memory of the dead, and that their lives shape our decisions and actions today… The presence of the ones who've died shapes the actions of the living. Most often, because we loved them.' Those of us in formal ministry are often called upon to take funerals. This can involve moving encounters with relatives and at times can be quite harrowing, especially if the death is an untimely one or one in which violence has been

involved. One of the functions of funerals is to remember those we have loved without idealising them. 'Love is my meaning' as Julian of Norwich put it.

Next weekend we shall remember those who died in times of conflict. Their voices ask us to remember them and honour their sacrifice. I find this to be a particularly poignant time of year. Not only was my father an RAF Chaplain serving in the Far East before he came here to St Anne's. My husband of twenty years was an Army Officer who served in Northern Ireland at the time of the Troubles. Now my daughter is a Naval Officer, based on land now, but served in the last Gulf war on HMS Ark Royal. They all knew what it was to lose comrades. I sometimes have to explain to people that they are peacekeepers, not warmongers. We have a special responsibility to pursue all that makes for peace, whether in the world or in our communities or in our hearts.

Coming back to Lucy Winkett's thoughts about All Saints: 'The communion of saints teach something else. On this feast of All Saints, in thanksgiving for the generations gone before, we gather in remembrance that we human beings are dead for much longer than we are alive. Our lives are short. Packed full of bravery, foolishness, miscalculations, triumphs. Packed full of life.

The saints are near, just one heart beat away, urging us on by their stories, their words, their actions. Passionate, enquiring, courageous, flawed; the invitation of the saints is clear: they invite us not to learn how to die, but, vitally, how to live.'

If we need reminding how to live, we can return to the Beatitudes which complement those two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And a second commandment is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". It behoves us all to hold in mind the Beatitudes as we try to live out these two great commandments, while we live.

On this feast of All Saints, I'd like to end by reading one of Malcolm Guite's poems which celebrates the ordinary, quietly unknown saints. You may recognise some of them here.

**A last beatitude**

And blessèd are the ones we overlook;
The faithful servers on the coffee rota,
The ones who hold no candle, bell or book
But keep the books and tally up the quota,
The gentle souls who come to 'do the flowers';
The quiet ones who organize the fete,
Church sitters who give up their weekday hours,
Doorkeepers who may open heaven's gate.
God knows the depths that often go unspoken
Amongst the shy, the quiet, and the kind,
Or the slow healing of a heart long broken,
Placing each flower so for a year's mind.
Invisible on earth, without a voice,
In heaven their angels glory and rejoice.

from *Sounding the Seasons* 2012, Canterbury Press, p. 59

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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