# A Sermon for the Feast of All Saints

Today is the feast of All Saints. We celebrate our Patronal festival today and we rejoice together. It is an apt time for reflection, and for hope.

While attending some of the events for the ABM in Sydney this week, I was delighted to see the energy and enthusiasm of those who were working to help those in need, those who supported the work of mission here in Australia and around the world, and celebrated living out the Gospel call to share the good news through acts of generosity and empowerment. Meeting those from communities where ABM actively works, like Rev. Dr. Saw Shee Sho, Bishop of the Toungoo Diocese in Myanmar, gave insight into just how transformative these projects can be, providing clean water and food security, education and training that promote self-sufficiency, and emergency relief for those displaced by conflict and disaster. It was a tangible demonstration of our ability to do wonderful and life-giving things when we act collectively, and pursue a common goal.

Here at All Saints give thanks for the past, over 165 years of worship in this place, and for those who have shaped it and brought it to this day. We give thanks for all that it is now, everyone who is part of this community and who call this place a spiritual home and make a contribution to the life of this Parish. And we look to the future. We think of future generations who will know this place as a place of prayer and worship, and of connection to the divine.

All Saints is also a time to reflect on those generations of believers who have influenced us and whose lives, thought and actions have shaped our own. Some of them are close to us; maybe they are members of our families, friends or colleagues. Some may have been deeply faithful and identified themselves as Christians, others may have taught us profound theological lessons without necessarily being card-carrying Christians. Some of them we may have never met personally, but their influence is just as profound – think of those whose wisdom has shaped our lives and has directed us towards God. I'd hazard to name CS Lewis, Rowan Williams, Charles Wesley, and John Keble as some of mine. I'm sure you'll know who yours are.

But this does make it seem that the Saints are a group who are predominantly based in actions past. And that is not the case. The Saints of God are a living, breathing, active group, and includes every single one of us. All of us who follow the

commandments to love and who are committed to making the world a more compassionate and graceful place are Saints. We carry on the work begun millennia ago, and which, by God's grace, will continue for millennia to come.

We are God's Saints.

This was excellently and somewhat amusingly expressed in a hymn about the Saints by Lesbia Scott, who wrote in the final verse:

*They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still;*
*the world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus' will;*
*You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,*
*in church or in trains, or in shops, or at tea:*
*for the saints of God began just like me, and I mean to be one too.*

While the listed meeting places may seem a little saccharine, she makes a wonderful and endearing point. People of faith can be encountered anywhere and everywhere, and this should both inspire and delight us. If we believe that God is omnipresent, then the people of God should also be found in all places.

In the words "I mean to be one too", Scott hints at the effort needed to live out our Christian calling. It is a life's work. The final part of the Gospel passage lays down a challenge for the Christian, and explains just how Jesus calls us to live each day. It includes being compassionate to all, not bearing grudges, and forgiving others who have wronged us. These are not easy things to accomplish, but if and when we do, we live a life that is free from things which can burden us and limit us.

And if you're thinking that this sounds like an impossible standard to meet, be comforted by the fact that Jesus lived them out too. He loved and forgave his enemies, and prayed for those who wished for his death. He gave himself over to those who would persecute and kill him rather than flee or face them with violence. In Jesus, we have someone who lived out his teaching to the full, in the hope that we would be guided by him.

His life was entirely shaped by that commandment to love, treating all people with love, respect and dignity, and consistently calling for us to do likewise. He calls us to become Saints, those who lives are shaped and defined by faith in God, the following of God's wisdom, and the showing forth God's grace and compassion.

Jesus is one who offers God's consolation – the Beatitudes that we heard today begin by offering words of great blessing, but in the same breath Jesus also challenges those who need to be confronted. Jesus was the embodiment of the aphorism 'comfort the disturbed, disturb the comfortable', and this is important.

In offering comfort, he recognises that life is difficult – there is poverty in this world, there is hunger of many kinds, there is mourning and grief, and there is hatred and acts of cruelty – but there is also the opportunity to counter all these things with grace and empathy. In offering words of warning, 'woe to you', Jesus warns us against complacency, and accepting the status quo. The world cannot change for the better unless we are willing to act, and there are so many things that need our attention, and our action.

This command rings down throughout the generations. It was not something for the early Church alone. We can interpret this as a direct commandment to us here in the Parish of All Saints today … we could even consider it a Patronal Festival gift … be willing to act on what you believe and be a living Saint. Be a person of love, who shows God's grace and mercy to the world, and adds to it through your own action.

If we do, we build upon the work of the Saints who have made this place what it is, and we ensure that its future is one which shines with the light and wisdom of God. May God, and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, be with us in our labours.

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