

## **Year A All Saints' Day**

Revelation 7: 9-17

1 John 3: 1-3

Matthew 5: 1-12

### **The right road to sainthood?**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. **Amen.**

As you will be aware, four years ago I walked from Santander to Santiago de Compostela and on to the coast at Finistere and Muxia. And how did I know I was on the right road, the right path, the right way? Because there were signs, normally yellow arrows and yellow scallop shell symbols to point me in the right direction. But occasionally I came to a junction, or a path that split in two, and there wasn't a sign to help me; no yellow arrow, no yellow scallop shell sign. Most of the time the right path was fairly obvious and clear – a well-worn and trodden route compared to one that was overgrown. But on at least one occasion, when in the middle of a forest early in the day as the sun was hardly over the horizon, it was much harder to make a choice of path, to find the right way. What could I trust as evidence to guide me in making the right choice of path? I needed faith in a faint sign in the gloaming, a hard to see, indistinct marking or footprint, in order to make the right choice.

And this seems to be a fairly good metaphor to me for our Christian faith. Most of the time it is pretty obvious what the right things are that we should be doing, what choices to make, what is the right road or path to take. But there are times when it is far less clear.

In our faith, we do have the examples of great saints to help us, to inspire us, to help us see what choices they made in order to help bring God's kingdom to earth. And not all 'saints' have been through a formal process of canonisation – I can think of some really wonderful and faithful people who have not yet anyway, been given the title of a saint. I am sure we can all think of what I may call 'everyday saints', people who will never be known across the world and have a saints day, but who have left an indelible mark on us; who have given us an example to follow; who have taught us something about our faith that stays with us.

My mum's faith was given to her by her grandmother. In the early 1930's my mum would spend the school summer holidays with her grandparents in their small end of terrace house in Broadstairs, Kent. Her grandmother would take her to St Anne's church every Sunday, and say prayers with her each night. Her grandmother was by all accounts a lovely gentle and hardworking woman. An everyday saint, who we are called to remember today. And I am sure we can think of people who are alive now, who we consider to be 'everyday saints', who unknown to themselves in all likelihood, remind us of God's presence here and now.

Some of you will know that one of one person I look to for inspiration, although not an 'everyday Christian' because he did achieve fame, is Eric Liddell. He was made famous through the film, Chariots of Fire. At the height of his athletic prowess and fame, he went to China (where he had been brought up) to become a missionary. His exploits there could fill many a sermon, but suffice to say that he maintained his faith and did some awe-inspiring work amongst the long-suffering Chinese in the 1930's and early 1940's. Eric was interned by the Japanese after they invaded China in WWII and he died of a brain haemorrhage in Feb 1945, at the age of 44. In

the internment camp he was tireless in his teaching and provided an inspiring Christian role model to the youngsters there. Eric often used to preach on the Beatitudes.

And he taught the people in the internment camp to pray for their captors; the cruel and brutal Japanese guards. I am reminded of this because it came up in conversation after morning prayer this last week, when I prayed for the man arrested in Nice for the murder of three people in the Basilica there. We have no idea who or what put hatred into this man's heart and mind, and how many others like him may have the same intentions. We are called to pray for not just our friends. We are called to pray for all who have taken the wrong path.

In our reading of the Beatitudes this morning, from Matthew's gospel, we can be puzzled by what it says to us. Blessed are the poor in spirit – really? Blessed are the meek – you have got to be kidding me? So why are the beatitudes held up as such a significant part of Jesus's teaching?

When you hear the word 'blessed' it may have a meaning for us that Jesus was not conveying to the people. The Hebrew word in this context is 'ashar' which means 'to find the right road' – it doesn't mean to be happy which is how some translations of the bible have chosen to print it.

So 'Blessed are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God' is understood to really be:

'We feel we are on the right road, we feel it is right, when the awareness of our poverty of spirit brings us humbly to learn from Jesus, because it is only through learning and following Jesus that we

can experience the kingdom of heaven and help bring that kingdom to earth.

Blessed are the meek: we feel we are on the right path when we do not let our ego and passions control us, when we recognise the authority of God and are willing to follow the ways of Jesus. Being meek isn't about letting everyone trample over us. Being meek means we know we cannot do things alone; but in faith and in following God's will, so much is possible.

I'll leave you reflect on the other beatitudes and consider what they mean in the light of understanding the word translated in to English as 'blessed'.

In this way the nine beatitudes are a checklist for us, to help us make sure we are on the right road, that we are choosing the right path in our discipleship with Jesus. They are also a reminder that we are already blessed by God, we do not need to earn it, and that can be a surprise to us all.

The beatitudes help keep us on the right path, heading in the right direction towards our ultimate goal. We need to keep an eye on our route, to make sure we remain on the right path. To do this well in our lives we need to be honest with ourselves, to be courageous enough to search our souls, to search the dark corners we often would prefer not to look to closely in to, and to reflect on the choices we make each day, to see how they match up to the beatitudes.

The challenge for us, and it is a considerable one, is to consider that this teaching of Jesus applies to us individually. If we believe in Jesus, then should we not also fully follow his nine points to a saintly life? For surely in the Beatitudes Jesus is describing the journey, the right

roads and paths to take, so we do not get lost on our journeys in faith?

I think it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said that after saying the Lord's Prayer we should always recite the beatitudes.

The individuals we look up to, the saints in the past and of today are our signposts that we are on the right path. They are our yellow arrows on our way, our camino, through life.

We can strive to act from such a place, one of total faith, knowing that we will not always get it right, that we will choose the easy path from time to time, not the one that is imbued with kingdom values.

And, what will help you and me make the right choices, take the paths that help bring God's kingdom down to earth?

Who has inspired you? Who inspires you today?

What spiritual discipline works for you, that helps you make the right decision? Maybe you have yet to find one, or one you have used isn't really working just now?

We are all unique and will have approaches to building a personal relationship with God that works for us. I know that for me, using Lectio Divina has been a tremendous help, as has having a discipline of Christian guided meditation, listening for the voice of God and stilling the incessant chatter and noise in my own mind.

What would help you to focus on God and Jesus and help build up your faith, so that you can more closely follow Jesus' teachings?

What would better equip you to help God's kingdom come, which is what we pray for each week in the Lord's Prayer?

The Beatitudes are our road map, they give us a clear sign, as good as any brightly painted yellow arrow or scallop shell symbol, of the right path, the right decisions, the right actions we should be taking every day, that will show we have faith in our Lord and Saviour, and just as importantly, will help God's kingdom come on earth.

When in doubt about what to do, what path to take, the nine reminders contained in the Beatitudes will keep you on the right path. We all need to pray for the personal faith to follow them; after all it is the road map that Jesus gave us.

And each new day Jesus invites us into a deeper relationship with him and his father, so that we can help God's kingdom come.

How will you, an 'everyday saint', respond to that invitation?