

We have this past week celebrated the 500th Anniversary of the moment that marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, an event which changed not just the church but the world in so many ways. It is worthy of celebration but like all movements it has unintended consequences and one of them has been a tendency towards individualism, and it is alive and well in our community today.

I realised how prevalent it has become when I was posted to the Army Recruit Training Centre. Suddenly young folk find themselves having to work together, care for each other, console and encourage each other. The Australian Army Doctrine on character says some surprising things. It states that a soldiers' moral and spiritual qualities are as important as physical fitness and military skills perhaps more so when under stress. That is quite a statement given the emphasis on fitness and skill at arms. Moral and spiritual qualities are intrinsically communal and I often opined that soldiers should be spending more time in the chapel than in the gym or at the range.

Ultimately what army recruit training was about was communal resilience; the ability to cope with the ups and downs of life, the ability to bounce back when there were uncertainties, difficulties, adversity, trauma, tragedy or threat. Resilience comes when folk are hopeful, altruistic, have a sound moral compass and a faith or spirituality, folk that are good humoured, have good role models and social supports, are able to face fear, have purpose or meaning in their life, and last of all, have been trained! This is a Beatitudes for the 21st Century!

During my posting to Army Recruit Training more often than not when the phone rang late in the evening, it was because a young recruit had found this business of resilience was all too much. He or she had run out of hope, altruism and faith and their sense of humour had long evaporated! The Chaplains would try and speak into their situation talk up these Beatitudes and remind them of those who had gone before them, and their struggles. Who are these people?

This is the question posed in today's first reading from the Book of Revelation. The question posed today was not by the author but one of the elders and the response from John 'I don't know you tell me!' It is a question that perhaps we might ask today...who are these Saints that we celebrate today, who are these people? Who are these people dressed in white robes and where do they come from? And the answer from the elder: 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' Those who are gathered around the throne are not necessarily the great

and the good, the best, the kindest, the gentlest etc, but those who endured, those who showed great resilience in the face of great ordeal, those who showed a resilience born out of faith.

In the letter to the Hebrews we read these wonderful words: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.* The Saints are clearly those who have endured, persevered and in doing so they have been a witness, they gave evidence for God, made God believable by the ways that they lived and died. They are not perfect, they are fallible, they have strengths and weaknesses, but they witnessed to the truth and this is where the rubber hits the road for us. Who are these people? It is us too when we witness to the love of God in our lives. In this great cloud of witnesses are the patriarchs and matriarchs, the saints, prophets, martyrs, confessors etc gone before us, those whose lives we hold up as witnesses, heroes in the faith. But the letter to the Hebrews says something quite extraordinary about these folk, the end of chapter 11; it says that *'apart from us they should not be made perfect.'* The writer says that apart from you and me these giants of the faith, these heroes will not be made perfect!! They are perfected by the handing on of the faith to us, they are perfected when their witness to the truth comes alive in us! When their perseverance, their endurance, their resilience is taken up by us.

This resilience is revealed in the beatitudes. There is witness to be offered by knowing our need of God; by the way we mourn, by our humility, our striving for righteousness, mercy, purity, peace, by the way in all things that we persevere. This is our witness and in giving this witness we are indeed blessed because as the letter to the Hebrew tells us we shall be perfected by those who come after us, by those whose lives have been touched by ours in whatever roles we have played or vocations we have lived. What a great privilege and responsibility, what a challenge to make God credible in our age by living the spirituality of the beatitudes.

This is what the 'Communion of Saints' in the creed is all about. The Church is a grass roots movement; we are all called to be saints. The Church's life is manifested in the lives of All the Saints who persevered in following Christ – it is handed on to us, fellow members of the Body of Christ and we in turn are called to hand it on, in our context and our age, through our limited, faltering understandings, our doubts and misgivings, our triumphs and failures but importantly our perseverance, called to pass it on to another era and time, a faith that at the end of time will be perfected by Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, *the* pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Amen.