

Sunday 31st October 2004, Sermon for All Saints and All Souls Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
- Psalm 149
- Ephesians 1:11-23
- Luke 6:20-31

Each year I preface my address on All Saints by explaining why we do a job lot on All Saints and All Souls Days combined. That is because to observe them separately gives the idea that there is a kind of first class Saint as opposed to an economy class saint (or soul). So I prefer to celebrate the faithful all together — for they — and we, are together — united in the love of God which is expressed in Christ and His Spirit.

The Bach Cantata "Christ is my life" expresses the wonderful mystery and reassurance that beyond death the promise of Christ is Life with God. I am grateful to Alison and Anastasia, Rob and Marco, with Colin and Michael for the music they bring us!

I looked back to All Saints Day 1999 to discover that the soloists for the Mozart Mass were a couple of people named Amanda Forbes and Marco Agostini, and I looked back to my induction in February 1999 to discover among the singers were Alison Knight and Rob Clayton as part of Cantare and Rob Clayton...

Five, nearly six years on, it is good to have them back.

I notice too that JS Bach's motets and cantatas were designed to be musical accompaniments and interpretation of the sermon!

All Saints Day is a confident celebration.

...Confident because it is grounded in what we know of God's promises through Christ and we should not let the modern Halloween "All Hallows Eve" with its ghoulish and scary images overshadow the observance.

The New Testament reminds us that all Christians are saints or HAGIOI — holy ones being the mark of God's holiness signified at baptism.

But a saint is called to "become what you are" and being the ark of holiness is to become — to grow up into that calling of God both in word and in deed!

I like Marco's translation of the cantata today: "since Christ is all my being"

Unfortunately we don't have incense tonight.

Incense is

- symbolic of prayer
 - Psalms use it as symbolic of offering and sacrifice
- of ancient Israel
- Temple
- early Christian
- Grew to prominence in christian use in the ninth century
- Only risen in usage over the last 150 years as a result of the liturgical renewal of the Oxford Movement.

The image Jesus paints in Luke 6 in the Sermon on the Plain

[pause; that's spelt p — l — a — i — n]

the image [not of the plane!] doesn't point to great **success** for the people of faith — instead it points to the reassurance of Grace — God's benevolence in spite of our failures. Wealth, success and popularity are nice — but they are fleeting and only applicable in this life —

Out of the experience of God's grace and blessing must grow a HOLINESS of life — a SAINTLINESS

- love your enemies
- do good to those who hate you
- bless those who curse you
- pray for those who abuse you
- forgive — turn the other cheek
- be generous —give

Surely these are the reversals of fortune brought about by God's people
They seem crazy but have surprising results!

There is, isn't there, because they undermine the ways of the world, a certain craziness about our attempts to know love and serve God. — I think Jesus is the archetype of this crazy attitude! It is also about the Christian hope — "the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints" St Paul calls it.

As we celebrate today

1. Recall your favourite Saint (Rob's: St Columba, St Nicholas)
2. Recall someone who revealed God's love to you (Alex Urban?)

For some, this service is akin to pagan ritual. People say why pray for and with those who no longer need our prayers.

I find that very sad.

And so I want to conclude with some words from a book by Bishop Tom Wright — Bishop of Durham...

"But there are many other reasons for praying, in addition to anxiety about someone's particular state. True prayer is an outflowing of love; if I love someone, I will want to pray for them, not necessarily because they are in difficulties, not necessarily because there is a particular need of which I'm aware, but simply

because holding them up in God's presence is the most natural and appropriate thing to do, and because I believe that God chooses to work through our prayers for other people's benefit, whatever sort of benefit that may be. Now love doesn't stop at death — or, if it does, it's a pretty poor sort of love! In fact, grief could almost be defined as the form love takes when the object of love has been removed; it is love embracing an empty space, love kissing thin air and feeling the pain of that nothingness. But there is no reason at all why love should discontinue the practice of holding the beloved in prayer before God.

...Once you get rid of the abuses which have pulled prayer out of shape, there is no reason why prayer should not stop just because the person you are praying for happens now to be "with Christ, which is far better". Why not simply celebrate the fact?" (pp73-74)

["For All the Saints?"
Remembering the Christian Departed. SPCK
Bishop N.T. Wright Bishop of Durham]

Pause:

May the faithful departed, through the mercy of God,
rest in peace and rise in glory!

Amen