

All Saints 2021

Do you have a particular Saint that inspires you? I have to confess I am rather taken by the ones that were excommunicated, the former addict, the unfaithful priest or the grumpy ones like Jerome!

When I finally get the opportunity to return to the UK and catch up with my family, I will be presented with a dilemma. My Father was very keen that I should inherit the family edition of '*Butlers Lives of the Saints.*' This was originally written in four volumes in the 1750's by the English Catholic priest Alban Butler under the title *The lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other principal Saints.* The family edition is the later revised version; written around the 1920's it now runs to twelve volumes! This is serious excess baggage!

Last Sunday we heard of the healing of Bartimaeus the blind beggar. Given the context of this passage, Mark is telling us that the healing miracle of Bartimaeus was a sign of something more, something greater. Bartimaeus was given a new vision: 'help me see again...help me to see anew,' Bartimaeus was shown that life is more than wealth (see the rich young man) and power (see James and John). It was as if he was given a glimpse into John's vision that we heard from the book of Revelation: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth'...'and the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' We heard this vision described this morning, a vision of a new heaven and earth, one in which death is no more. 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' So says one of the onlookers at the tomb of Lazarus. This new life is one born out of death, out of seeming hopelessness. This is what we are celebrating today.

There is a common misconception that saintliness is all about heroic virtue. Hagiographies abound describing the lives of saints and their extraordinary almost super human deeds of courage and perseverance. Bulter's 'Lives' begins: *Of all the parts of history, biography, which describes the lives of great men, seems the most entertaining and the most instructive and improving.* I'll lend it to you when it arrives in the country! I would imagine that most of us feel just a twinge of inadequacy when reading about these folk. But today we are not celebrating individual perfection. We are not celebrating saints as paragons of virtue.

We have tended to think along the lines: Sanctus...Saint, therefore Holy...Wholeness! This is not the case, you can't make the etymological or theological leap from Sanctus to wholeness! What we

celebrate today are folk who have been given a vision of something new, out of hopelessness, and act on that vision, give it flesh, speak it and act it into reality; this is what it is to be a saint. Saints are not 'whole people' in the way we use that term today, like wheat germ! That vision as we heard this morning is a corporate vision, it is not about being perfected or wholeness as individuals but about being brought back into communion, Bartimaeus and Lazarus were restored to their families, their communities, their situations were hopeless. Jesus restores them. Bartimaeus sees and Lazarus is unbound. Both were both in seemingly hopeless situations they were both given a new way of seeing and being, a new perspective; they both followed the way of Jesus. It is interesting that both the accounts of Lazarus and Bartimaeus, whilst they occur in different gospels, come just before the Passover, just before Jesus arrived into Jerusalem. Both these men were almost certainly there in Jerusalem during that first Holy Week, we can but only imagine the excitement of these two. But did they desert him?

I stumbled across a book during the week appropriately enough called All Saints. It is a series short stories about a number of individuals all of whom are somehow connected—some directly, others tenuously with a fictional Anglican Church in Toronto, Canada. All Saints is a dwindling parish where the funerals outnumber the baptisms and little happens. The book features Simon, its newly widowed priest who lusts for a parishioner; Owen, a socially maladroit man who attends its book club; and Alice, an elderly female mass murderer who attended the church as a girl. Kelly goes to church because it's never going to dump her. Barney is building a room in his basement to escape his wife, he reminisces fondly about his army buddy and wonders about his sexuality while reflecting on human vulnerability.

These unlikely characters all glimpse a vision of something different and in their own ways strive to act upon it. But they do not do it alone, they are connected and inter connected, they do so in the context of community. They are broken and these are the saints that we celebrate today as well as the well-known ones. They make up and are re-membered as the Communion of Saints that we will profess in the Apostles Creed very soon.

When you read a hagiographical account of one of the great heroes of the faith and are feeling just a little inadequate, remember there is no such thing as an unlikely saint. Our calling is to catch the vision, understand our distinctive role within the community and follow along the way in the knowledge that the cross will impede that way... but saints don't carry their crosses alone! Amen.