

## Blessed are . . . (1)

30 10 11

Almighty God,  
you have knit together your elect  
in one communion and fellowship  
in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord:  
grant us grace so to follow the blessed saints  
in all virtuous and godly living  
that we come to those inexpressible joys  
that you have prepared for those who love you.

My text today is from the Matthew's gospel chapter 5 and verse 2, '**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**'

Today is the day in our church calendar when we celebrate All Saints. Strictly speaking, All Saints Day is as you know the 1<sup>st</sup> November but it is our custom to transfer most major festivals that occur during the week to the nearest Sunday so that in 2011, All Saints is for us marked on 30<sup>th</sup> October – ironic given Hallowe'en, the Eve of All Saints, is in fact tomorrow.

That said, I'd like to pose the question 'What is a saint ?' In one sense, a saint is a hero of the faith, someone, man or woman, boy or girl, who is recognised by the Church as having led an exemplary life and as such is a good role model. In another sense, we are all saints: for example, at the start of Paul's letter to the

Ephesians, he addresses what he writes ‘**to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus**’ (1 v1) thereby recognising the inherent holiness we as members of the Church share in our desire and attempt to live faithful, Christian lives.

But what the question I want to ask today is ‘What are the qualities that are typical of a saint?’ / ‘What are the virtues inherent in trying to live the faithful Christian life?’ To help me do so, we have a checklist in the opening verses of Matthew’s record of the Sermon on the Mount which are collectively known as the Beatitudes – **Blessed are the . . .** Now as you know there are nine so that in a sermon the length of mine, it would be impossible to do justice to the richness of each Beatitude so for four Sundays, I propose to preach a four sermon series exploring the qualities of sainthood as reflected in the Beatitudes entitled: **Blessed are . . .** and today let us begin with ‘**Blessed are the poor in spirit**’.

‘**Blessed are . . .**’ and immediately we have a problem because what we have is not so much a translation of the original Greek but a rephrasing that works in English, a paraphrase. What we have, translated as ‘**Blessed are**’, in the Greek literally means ‘**O the blessedness of . . .**’ As such we have something that is very exciting – not a pious hope of what might be but a joyful recognition of what in fact is. Of course, ultimately the virtue will be perfected in heaven but there is excitement present here and now. And this God-like joy is implied by **μακαριος** (**makarios**), the Greek word used at the start of each Beatitude. **Μακαριος** encapsulates a joy which is perfect in itself, an inner serenity that cannot be upset by the changes and chances of this life.

But what do you make of this first Beatitude ? What does the phrase ‘**Blessed are the poor in spirit**’ mean to you ? Confused, unsure, I sought help from to William Barclay’s commentary on Matthew where I found the answer. Essentially, Barclay points out that the Greek word used here for poor is **πτωχος (ptochos)**, which means someone who is completely destitute, without money or resources of any kind. Its parallel in Hebrew is **ani** or **ebyon** which may be used to describe someone who is so poor that they come to rely totally on God. And so we have it. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ means ‘Blessed is someone who realises their own utter helplessness and had put their whole trust in God’. Saints, then, are folk who know in themselves they lack what only God can provide so they come to rely on him to energise their lives and to enable them to be fully the people that God intends them to be. Sainthood begins with an understanding of self in relationship to God.

So on the feast of All Saints, let us remember with thankfulness the past heroes of our faith who provide a good example of what it means to be committed, practising Christians. And let us remember that we in turn are called to be saints and that the joy of being a saint begins with our need for God and a right relationship with him.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist  
St Bartholomew’s, Dinard  
30<sup>th</sup> October, 2011*

