

## Them and us – all saints ?

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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 your blessed saints  
in all virtuous and godly living  
that we may come to those inexpressible joys  
that you have prepared for those who truly love you.

Our text today may be found in Luke's gospel, chapter 6 and verse 20:

'Blessed are you . . .'

Do you consider yourself to be 'blessed' ? Do you think of yourself as part of God's elect, 'blessed' not because we are beautiful and intelligent, young, bright and fit but because God knows us, knows who we are and what we are and still God loves us because we are his children and he wants us to be with him in a loving relationship ?

Today, in church, we celebrate All Saints. November begins with All Saints' Day quickly followed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> by All Souls Day so, this morning, I'd like to explore briefly the question of 'Them and Us', the question whether or not we too might be considered to be numbered among the saints ?

The word 'saint' means 'holy' – it comes from the Old English 'helig' meaning 'without impurity', 'devoted to God'. In Latin, the word is 'sanctus'; in Greek, 'ἅγιος' (hagios); and in Hebrew, 'qadosh'. It came as something of a surprise to me to discover that the adjective, qadosh, and its noun, qodesh, mean separate, to set apart. That gave me a shock because as you may well remember, the word Pharisee means separated ones – for the Pharisees considered themselves to be holy because they had as little to do with the everyday sinful, unclean world as possible.

So, let me ask again on the day we celebrate All Saints, do you feel like a saint ?

And I guess the answer is not. Given we are encouraged to be modest, self-effacing, who among us would claim to be special, to be holy, pious, devoted to God ? To be honest is to be only too aware of the many ways we do fall short of the ideal, the many imperfections, spots blemishes in our lives, the many times we've been stupid, the many times we've been mischievous and negative, the many times we been destructive and evil. One of the things I love about the new Pope Francis is his humility, that the heir of St Peter can see himself as a sinner. A man devoted to God, François knows his humanity renders him imperfect in the sight of God, that he stands in need of God's forgiveness and of God's grace.

And there we have it: God has called not the perfect to serve him but humanity with all our imperfections. Like the Prodigal Son, we may have gone well astray but like this ill-informed, young man, we can come to our senses and want to come home to say sorry. It is not our perfection that makes us potential saints

but our willingness and our readiness to respond to God, to repent of what we have done wrong and to try to be better. And with the grace of God we can.

So let me leave you with this thought on All Saints. There is a real sense that we are all part of the communion of the saints. True, we may not be like our patron saint, St Bartholomew, who was flayed alive for his faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. We may not have devoted our lives to spreading the gospel. We may not have sat at Jesus' feet and learnt from him and been promised a vision of angels ascending and descending to and from heaven. But because God loves us we can access his forgiveness and grace and be truly the people God wants us to be when first he saw us in our mother's womb – his saints on earth albeit not without fault.

So in the Kingdom of God, perhaps there is no them and us, that the surprising and challenging thought on this All Saints' Day is that we are all called to be saints ! That all of us have the potential to be counted among his saints ! What do you think ? And what do you think you need to do if this is true for you ?

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

*Preached at the Eucharist  
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