

## All Saints

1 11 15

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 may be found the Psalm appointed for today (24 v4):

**'clean hands and a pure heart.'**

Who's your favourite saint ? Do you admire Peter the rock or do you prefer John the beloved ? Does Francis of Assisi cut the mustard for you and do you think the Pope named after him, Francis I, will one day be elevated to the status of sainthood ? I must confess that I have grown to love Nathaniel Bartholomew, our patron saint and over two and half years in our parish magazine, you may well have faithfully read, chapter by chapter, 'The Gospel according to Bartholomew' which I wrote - certainly, Nathaniel Bartholomew has many of the virtues of sainthood, not least that most of his deeds for God go unsung, untold, unheard. So, today, 1<sup>st</sup> November, Toussaints, the feast of All Saints, I'd like us to consider

what it means to be a saint, to be someone who the psalmist says has 'clean hands and a pure heart.'

In Hebrew, there are four words for saint; in Greek one: Hebrew has 'chaside', 'qadosh', 'qaddish' and 'qodesh'. Chaside means 'kind' or 'pious'; the other three collectively mean, 'separate', 'apart', 'holy'. Greek has  $\alpha\gamma\iota\omicron\varsigma$  ('hagios') has the same meaning. So essentially a saint is someone who is God-centred and people aware who tries to mirror God's love to others.

Let me ask just two questions:

- Who is a saint ?
- What does that mean for us ?

Who is a saint ? I guess there are two answers. One says that in some sense of the word we are all saints or at least we all have the potential to be one. Not through our own righteousness but through the grace of God we can be like the saints in Rome, Corinth or Ephesus to whom Paul wrote his Epistles. Each of us here has the potential to have clean hands and pure hearts and to live faithfully the good Christian life.

Another response might be that saints are those who are especially recognised by the church to have lived exemplary Christian lives, who by what they did, by what they said and by what they wrote, they embodied as far as is possible the Holy Spirit.

And what does that mean for us ? Again, two possible answers. One is that saints living or dead are role models. Their lives are a witness to the truth in which we believe and they act as a challenge and an inspiration to us as we seek to be the people that God truly intends us to be, his people reflecting his light in the world.

Another is that saints are people in heaven to whom we can pray, who can and will intercede with God on our behalf. The practice is very Catholic and the Protestant Reformation reacted strongly against devotion to particular saints, preferring the fact that we have a direct line to God the Father by praying in the name of God the Son, inspired by God the Holy Spirit. But my favourite example of the former Catholic view is when some twenty years ago, a cleaner at my school inadvertently lost the diamond from her engagement ring while cleaning. The caretaker's wife was a good Catholic and a good friend to Jan so Sue prayed to St Anthony and sure enough the stone was found on the draining board of the butler sink in the cupboard opposite my office !

So, today, on All Saints' Day, let's simply ask what we need to do to have clean hands and pure hearts and how best to understand the communion of saints ?

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

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

*1<sup>st</sup> November, 2015*

