

All Saints Sunday 2014

The Feast of All Saints. Should you ever find yourself in York tear yourself away from the Minster or the chocolate museum or the York Dungeons and wander over to the other side of the river to visit All saints Church. Its a wonderful little medieval building with a miraculous quantity of wonderful C14th stained glass reminding us of the ways in which the Medieval church encouraged the ordinary parishioner to grow in holiness, to grow in sanctity- to aim at becoming one of the company of the saints.

The glass in all saints offers a visual check list for holiness. One window depicts the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, greed, lust, anger, gluttony and sloth. Avoid these if you want to attain to sanctity.

Another window, the Goad of Conscience, is based on the Revelation to St. John the Divine. It shows the destruction of the earth as evil appears to ride rampant - to be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth. We are reminded that the way of sanctity, the way of holiness, the way of the saints is the way of repentance, love and judgement - the Goad which drives us to the glory of Christ.

Another window shows The Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy. Based on Matthew 25 the seven corporal acts of mercy are: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, offering hospitality to strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, caring for those in prison, burying the dead. Seven practical ways to holiness - matched by the Seven Spiritual works of Mercy spelling out the mission of the church in Christ: to instruct the ignorant with the Gospel; to counsel those who doubt the Faith of Christ, to admonish sinners; to bear wrongs patiently; to forgive offences willingly; to comfort the afflicted; and to pray for the living and the dead.

The Seven deadly sins, the seven corporal works of mercy, the seven spiritual works of mercy, the Goad of conscience - all serve as holy check lists, the ways in which we may serve Christ and serve our neighbour as part of Christ's redeeming work.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus also gives a holy check list - the Beatitudes : Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are those who mourn,. Blessed are the meek,.

Jesus spells out the way of holiness, that is blessing and joy - if only we begin truly to see. Blessed are the poor in spirit, says Jesus- those who live ordinary, unspectacular lives for God, never imagining their little lives contribute much, are in truth blessed and joyful. In the end, much to their surprise they will find themselves welcomed by the risen Lord himself: Well done thou good and faithful servant enter into the joy of thy Lord.

Blessed are those who mourn, says Jesus. Luther in his German translation uses the word: leidtragen - sorrow bearing. Those who through prayer, listening and service share something of the pains, sufferings and sorrows of others are truly blessed, happy, joyful - holy, because sharing in the work of Christ who bears the sufferings and sins of the world. So too the meek, rather than lashing out in retaliation to unjust ill treatment, seek to bear the wrongs of this world patiently as Christ bore the wrongs of the world on the cross.

And why the Cross? Christ hungers, thirsts for truth, goodness, love, forgiveness and community to prevail. The Good Friday Christ cries out "I thirst" but he does not drink the proffered sour wine - because Christ's thirst, the thirst of Christ's saints, is thirst for mercy, purity of heart, single minded worship, compassion, reconciliation and genuine care for the outcast, the sinful.

Christ and his saints bring God's healing, accepting and affirming love and forgiveness to those who feel quite unworthy of God -and are probably disregarded by the so-called pious. Christ and his saints actively seek out the despairing, the heart broken, the poverty stricken - yes even the drunk, the drug addict, the corrupted and corrupting -and tell them that despite everything, indeed because of everything, they are valued and loved by God - Christ died for them too. Small wonder then that Christ was killed - for when his Gospel is truly proclaimed the so-called great and good, and even the merely moralistic, rise up in outrage.

Christ calls his saints to share his sufferings: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter evil against you on my account.

These are they whose hearts were riven,
Sore with woe and anguish tried,
Who in prayer full oft have striven,
With the God they glorified;

Now, their painful conflict o'er, God has bid them weep no more.

Christ's Way and Christ's Cross are rejected and scorned by a world enticed into secularist consumerism. So-called "common sense" decries the very existence of God - but the Church, and the saint replies quietly "for all our doubts we know God to be true reality". So-called "common sense" rejects Christ's Cross as pointless waste; the life of prayer and holiness appears folly, divorced from reality and common sense. "You cannot alter Christian nature" cries the secular world- but the Church, and the saint replies quietly: God can and does, and we experience this in our own lives.. Through Christ, his Church and his sacraments we are remade in Christ's image, made holy. Through Christ the Kingdom of heaven breaks in - from the beginning of time through to today , continuing until time and eternity meld into new harmony, and we who are called to be saints on earth rejoice with those who even now sing in a greater light and on a further shore.

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day; The saints triumphant rise in bright array; The King of glory passes on His way. Alleluia, Alleluia!

Through Christ we share in the heavenly Banquet that is the Eucharist- foretaste of a new heaven and a new earth. As Christ feeds us with the heavenly food so we sing even now the song of the redeemed : Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever!