

Today is celebrated as All Saints Day and the word *Saint* is derived from the Latin *Sanctus*, meaning holy. The Old Testament prophet, Samuel first uses the word 'saints' to identify a special group of people whose faithfulness to God was seen in the very special way they lived out a truly holy life.

In the New Testament 'saints' are mentioned more frequently such as in the opening of Paul's letter to the Philippians where the meaning appears to have widened so that Paul considers all who believes in Jesus Christ to be a 'saint':

*To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Php1:1)*

I wonder if nearly 2,000 years on, Paul realised that his acclamation means that everyone of us here today is a saint, and it's true that at least one certain conference speaker (Simon Ponsenby) addresses his audience with a hearty 'Good morning saints'. And I must admit that Saint Terry of Ascot or Saint Carol of Sunningdale does have a certain ring to it.

But I think it's fair to say that most of us have grown up understanding that historically, Sainthood has only been conferred by the church on those few people whose life was a perfect illustration of the way a Christian should live. They are there as an example for us to aspire to and follow. Our Collect reflected that with the words "Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living".

Put simply, we are promised that if we lead a virtuous and godly life then we shall be blessed, just like the saints have been.

Our reading today is given the title in my bible of blessings and woes. 4 blessings contrasting with 4 woes, all designed to encourage us to look heavenward during the difficult trials and tribulations which we live through.

I don't know about you, but whenever I read or listen to today's reading, I tend to squirm in my seat a little. I much prefer the 9 blessings listed in Matthew's gospel in what we call 'The Beatitudes' and I often forget that Matthew warns of similar woes much later in his gospel – but they are there, nonetheless.

Here, Luke puts 4 blessings immediately alongside 4 woes and I think that is what makes the reading more powerful; more realistic and of course Jesus is speaking directly to his disciples, the founders of the church in which I serve.

It reminds me that the life of virtuous and godly living which I aspire to is challenging and difficult. It reminds me I'm no longer poor although I certainly was at one time; that I haven't experienced true hunger for over 50 years; that I once mourned deeply but now I often laugh out loud; that I have been insulted or marginalised because of my faith, although as Frank Sinatra would sing 'but then again too few to mention'.

So today I stand before you conscious I am comparatively rich and well fed. I enjoy privilege rather than discrimination and the lesson I draw from this echoes many of my end of year school reports, 'can do better'.

But my faith gives me hope; hope that I'm not a lost cause; that if someone like Saul the Persecutor can become Paul the Saint then there's still time for me to become the person Jesus would want me to be.

And who would that person be, you might well ask? And you may be surprised by my answer: a person like one of the figures in the south window over there.

Let me explain. Earlier this year, Rev Jon and I were hosting year 1 pupils from Holy Trinity Primary School as part of their 'getting to know your community' project. Unlike today, it was a lovely day and the sun shone brilliantly through the window making the colours sparkle.

One little girl near me whispered, "Who are those people in the glass window?" and before her teacher could even say 'ssh!' her friend said "they are the people God shines light through"

You know what? She defined more simply than I ever could what a saint is. Saints are people God's light shines through. Saints are people who have touched the lives of others with Christ's incredible love.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that I should be known as Saint Terry. Rather in a saint like way, dedicate my ministry here at Holy Trinity so that the light of Christ may shine through my words and deeds.

In John 8:12 Jesus says of himself: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life".

Later in our service young Wilbur will be given a lit candle as a symbol of that very light. My prayer is that God's light will not just burn brightly in Wilbur's heart but that he grows up to touch the lives of others with Christ's incredible love.

That he becomes the fleshly equivalent of the saints in the stained-glass window. And that over the years, through what Wilbur says and what he does, someone may catch a glimpse of what Christ is like.

As for my ministry here; indeed for all our lives, young or old, we can do no better than try to live out the final verse of today's scripture:

"Do to others as you would have them do to you". Or in other words - bless those in the way we are blessed through Christ's love

Amen

Revd. Terry Ward-Hall, 30 Oct 2022