

Matthew 5: 1 – 12

'All Saints Day'

1. *First of all Revd Jane showed us her 'halo' – a gift for halloween from her grandchildren – it was an illuminous circle, and she told us that they knew she did not really like halloween, so they thought a halo was more appropriate for her:*

'But Grandma we thought as you're going to church you'd like a halo!'

Well that was very kind and I suppose very suitable for the day following halloween ... hallow'ee'n – the eve of remembering the holy people whose lives are celebrated on All Saints' Day – today. I'm not sure, however, that I really deserve a halo – I'm not even sure that every saint really gets a halo ... but it does seem like a good time today to explore the idea of what is or who is a saint? Halos or not!

2. Our lives are certainly surrounded by saints in one way, at least by their names:

Challenge ... Can you count up in 20 seconds on your fingers the names of 10 saints? Let's give it a try ...

Answer ... Did you get 10? Hands up ***(several put up their hands and said names of various saints)***

There are certainly still names of saints that we hear about ... but who or what is a saint?

3. I went into Google:
First – Girl group
Second hit – American Football Team

Not much help there!

So who are popular individual saints?

St Christopher – patron saint of travel – some people still wear little medallions with the image of St Christopher carrying the infant Christ on his shoulders through a deep and dangerous flood ... perhaps after yesterday's announcement (re lockdown) a patron saint of travel is not going to be quite so useful ... but the idea of shouldering the burden of life, with Jesus, a willingness to share in his journey to the cross might be.

What about the National Patron Saints of the UK?

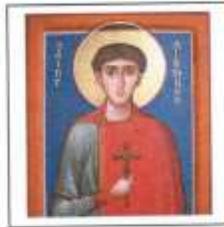
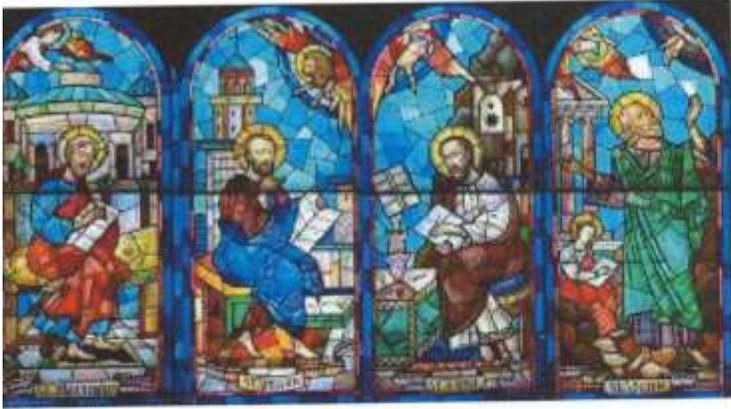
St David ... St George ... St Andrew ... St Patrick well-known names and often celebrated in each country they represent ... it might be useful in the current circumstances if they could all get together and unite us in our care for each other – a truly United Kingdom coming together to care for all its people.

There are many patron saints of medicine, doctors, nurses etc. St Luke and St Agatha being just two (interestingly Luke is also for some reason the patron saint of artists – perhaps that helps with the surgery)! People to set examples in a life of caring for others.

4. There are a few saints on the next page *(they were in our pew sheets at church)* ... easy to recognise 5 of them because they are named ... but let's just look at the top picture first ***(see next page then further page for continued text)***.

The 4 writers of the 4 Gospels – **St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke and St John** - the 4 saints who brought the good **PTO**

Text continued on next page ...



news of Jesus Christ into and around the world through the words they wrote witnessing to his divine ministry. **Gospel** means “good news” and each Sunday in church we have a reading from one of the Gospels. Today’s good news is from the Gospel of **St Matthew**. In this reading Matthew gives us the words Jesus spoke to introduce the group of teachings called the Sermon on the Mount. In this introduction we are told to be encouraged, to be ready to receive the Kingdom of God through Christ himself. It is a Kingdom that is promising future certainty, whatever our circumstances, and which thus transforms the present.

In some ways the list of assurances here (The Beatitudes) might be seen as a list of the attitudes we need to adopt to live saintly lives – a rule book for saints, or even a set of mottos – be meek, be mild, be sad, be happy ... then you’ll be blessed. **But** the blessing Jesus speaks of is a way of receiving blessedness. We’re not simply being told to make sure that we’ve acted kindly, or generously, or peacefully – much more than that we’re asked to understand that these things can only become fruitful when we recognise our inadequacies and give our lives to God to make us whole. It is only a **genuine** longing for God that will bring us to his Kingdom.

The Saints – some named with special days – most not known to us – are those whose longing for God leads them to act or speak or be in union with him. Saints remind us that to follow Christ is the way that points us up to God and out into the world. They don’t withdraw from the world but allow God’s kingdom to enter it – or they show us that our human shortcomings need to be released into God’s hands if we are to be blessed.

Complicated stuff in some ways, but we know that many of the Saints who brought the good news of the Kingdom often did so at great personal cost – being ‘saintly’, being bless-ed doesn’t remove anyone from the perils of the world – in fact Saints often pay the price of challenging the selfish values of a godless world ...

So who are the Saints? Let’s look again at the picture sheet (*on previous page*).

5. a) Well I thought I’d better include St Alkmund – briefly a Saxon King of Northumbria ... but known for his kindness, his charity and his Christian love for the poor and the orphaned ... a man who wanted peace but who died in war ... Many came to his tomb to receive healing. I think that the opportunity for his name and his love of God to prevail remains **here** in this church because of the work you do in Jesus’ name which spreads God’s love in the community – St Alkmund points us up to God, but out into the world.

b) Similarly St Melangell – one for my Welsh friends, though she was Irish, she fled from a forced marriage and retreated into a valley in the Berwyn Mountains to pray ... here she rescued a hare who hid under her cloak as a hunting party pursued it ... the local hunting prince was so impressed as he spoke with her that he gave her the land to preserve God’s creatures and he converted to Christianity ... she is the patron saint of hares (if not of princes!)

c) The final picture is a question or an answer – who are the saints in this soup kitchen? We don’t know – they are those who find ways to bring God’s love and peace to everyone around them so it could be those who receive and those who give. In the Monty Python film “Life of Brian” – the onlookers furthest away from Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount ask – **‘what did he say – whose blessed?’ ‘The cheesemakers – what? ... why are they so special’** ... peace makers actually! But, hey, in this part of Shropshire why not the cheesemakers?

As the saints themselves understood very well, it is not the proud and exalted who are closest to God, but the low paid worker, the home-carer, the quietly determined unsung heroes. If we really desire to be **at one** with Christ then whoever we are, whatever our age or background, with or without halos, we **know** that it is by truly recognising our weakness, our inadequacy we are empowered to join the company of all the saints and to be truly blessed and loved. Amen.