

## **31 October 2010: All Saints Sunday**

### **Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God**

**Readings: Ephesians 1.11-end; Luke 6.20-31**

In the name of God, Maker of all, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I am new to London commuting, and still at the stage when I count each time I make it to Morning Prayer at St Martin's on a weekday from Sydenham Hill a sort of major victory, from which I take the rest of the day to recover. As I cross the Strand from Embankment Station some time between 7.30 and 8 o'clock in the morning I want to punch the air – Yea! Made it.

The other morning I was stopped short in my punching the air behaviour as an elderly woman, poor, with bandaged legs, zimmer frame in white knuckled hands, and bags on back, painfully tried to cross the road without being knocked down. It was easy for me to do the slowing of the traffic, especially wearing a dog collar, but the questions left in my mind by her poverty took far longer to answer, and have not gone away.

We had just heard the day before about the coalition government's plans for massive public spending cuts. I am hopeless at politics, let alone economics, what will I be able to do to help or even protest, knowledgeably and to some use? As a former social worker what I certainly do know is that to ask people to change is not to be certain of their changing. To ask them to enter the employment market is not to assume that they can! Many people in the post war housing estates which were my social work patch in North Bristol simply didn't have the inner resources for change. To give them less income may expose their dependents or their own bodies and minds to serious risk – the wind is often already blowing through the door and I remembered one family who called me in because they were cold – they had already burnt the wood of the back door to feed the stove and simply didn't know what effect this would have long term. There is more to human change and income generation than can be sorted by simple demand and threat.

I felt rather depressed. How is that lady going to survive, how shall we survive as a body?

Jesus says in the words of today's reading from Luke's Gospel – How blessed are you who are poor now, how blessed are you who weep now, how blessed are you who get knocked about by those who hate you now, for trying to follow me. What does he mean!

Well perhaps the reward will come later? Come off it – some people have no later! This week St Martin's mourns the violent death of a member of our congregation, a brave good person and human rights lawyer who had her future snatched from her this week on the railway lines of King's Cross. What later for that saint? She had no apparent later here with us! But is she caught up somehow in this blessing business which Jesus goes on about?

Well, yes, I believe she is! I believe we all are! Living the Beatitudes, the blessings of Jesus, is what I think it means to be a saint. Living the Beatitudes we take on the weakness, the broken body of Christ-like-ness in the world, we live the fragility and consequent pain of Christ's human flesh and ours.

There are several steps to ponder here. First of all there is the mystery described in the letter to the Ephesians and heard in this morning's epistle.

“God has put all things under his feet and made Christ the head over all things for the church, which is Christ’s body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

By faith and prayer we gradually discern that **we are the Body of Christ**, we say it so glibly but think what it means – really his body, flesh, blood, arms, legs, head, now and for all eternity. We have a corporate identity in Christ and have already by God been incorporated into his death and resurrection, which has happened in all and for all the human race for ever. We human beings see time as a long line – we learn this, we learn to love this person, we do this in the world, we then forget that learning and make mistakes, we lose that dear person, we become more weak in the world’s eyes and the pain of that fragility, that loss, that failure are awful to us. The depth of the grief we suffer when we lose a beloved person, when we don’t live up to our own hopes for ourselves, when we are ill, when our track record at school or at work suddenly slips – our pain is awful to us and we risk being consumed by it, being lost in the pain of many deaths.

But in God that sort of linear time is non-existent or at least a different sort of Godly time in Christ exists alongside it – God sees us and knows us and loves us and longs for our good in Christ crucified and risen all the time. We live this fragile wounded body which is also Christ’s risen body, now and for all eternity.

And because we are together, one body in Christ, we suffer together – our loss, our poverty, our tears, our persecution just as we shall know ourselves risen to new life together. When we take the Holy Communion together this morning we take the bread which is broken – we become saints, we get to the kingdom’s breaking into our lives through acknowledging brokenness – broken body, blood spilled, wounded hands – stretch out your hand and put it into the wound in my side. And in God’s time we also live Christ’s glorious resurrection body – it is already done, already made, already existent for us though we do not see it yet existing as we do in linear time.

There is no other way to receive the kingdom but we don’t like it!

Instead, trying to shy away from our belonging together and all the wounds we feel in acknowledging that we collude with the world’s idea of the good life – the success models of the society around us. We would banish tears, deny loss, gather wealth for ourselves, eat too much, and tell off the person who has burnt down the back door of the house to create kindling and expect them to do better! – we have a strong desire to get the individual rewards for now safely tucked under our belts and expect everyone else to do the same no matter what their weakness may be. And we live out that desire instead of expressing our common, fragile interdependent humanity, wounds and all, in Christ. Following the goals of individualism we scarcely know Christ’s peace, let alone have anything real to give away to our neighbour.

Is it all a sort of searching for suffering, then, being a saint? As one delightful young person in this congregation groaned – does it all have to be so hard, this following Christ business? Fasting, and hair shirts, and serious faces, all that sort of thing? Of course not! Of course not! But it is about accepting, facing, using that fragility which is part of who and what we are as individuals and as a world – we do not need to search it out, God knows it makes itself very clear to us.

In that acceptance of reality, that acceptance of who and how we really are we are drawn in to a communion of saints, into an intense belonging of recognition and affirmation and forgiveness, one of another, in which we know joy and through which the glory of God shines. When we aim at glitter, human glitter –if we are already rich, already full, already

popular, already sleek, because we have sought those ends, that glory cannot shine, our own splendour gets in the way and pushes our neighbour out of our reach! But if we accept in Christ our common fragility and brokenness and need, if we allow our hunger for justice, our thirst for companionship, our longing for knowledge of God, our desire for the earth's healing to be the wounds through which God shines through us, then we shall be saints indeed. Piles of leaky overlapping colanders with the glory of God shining through is my image of the Communion of saints. We carry this glory in human vessels or pots – did you know that the clay described there was used for lamp and light coverings because the light shone through the clay it was so leaky and thin? St Martin's and the Anglican Communion and the Church Universal a pile of overlapping leaky colanders with the light shining through! Yea!

The glory of God is a human being, fully alive - may we Christ's body live his risen life and know all the saints to be caught up in that same life, now, here, and through all eternity, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.