All Saints Sunday 2025

I'd like you all to begin this morning by trying a little experiment. I'd like you all to close your eyes and imagine a saint…what comes to mind? Perhaps you imagine a stained-glass window; a holy figure with a halo, frozen in perfect stillness. Or maybe a statue of someone from long ago, like those in the Vatican or countless churches all over the world: calm, prayerful, distant, somehow more-than-human.

But that's not really what Jesus means by "saint." In fact, if we take the Beatitudes seriously, we see that sainthood looks quite different:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

"Blessed are those who mourn."

"Blessed are the meek."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

None of these people sound particularly impressive do they They're not the strong, the successful, or those whose lives are all sorted. They're the humble, the hurting, and the hopeful. Yet, Jesus calls them blessed. They are blessed not because of their circumstances, (Christ longs to transform desperate circumstances and to have us play our part in bringing that transformation into being) but because they live lives which are open to God's love.

Today, on All Saints' Sunday, we celebrate those people. Not just the famous saints with feast days and halos churches named after them, but the countless ordinary ones, people through whom the light of Christ has shone, often in quiet and unnoticed ways. People like Saint Bernadette, the simple, peasant miller's daughter from Lourdes who had a vision of the Virgin Mary. Human beings being the creatures that we are, she was hounded by religious fanatics until she entered a convent, where she dies aged only 35 years old. Or, from very recently, Carlo Acutis, a young man, born here in the UK, who died of Leukeamia in 2006, aged only 15 years old. A devout Christian, he used technology to bring people to the faith. These people were ordinary people, normal people of their times, just like every saint was. All Saints' Sunday isn't about remembering a special class of Christians who were somehow holier than the rest of us, walking on air, its about the miller's daughters and the techno savvy teenagers. It's about recognising that we are part of the same story, that all of us are called to be saints.

When Jesus stood on that hillside and began to speak, he was surrounded by ordinary people: fishermen, farmers, mothers, widows, workers, children. They were happy and well fed, and sad and hungry. They were young and old, male and female. Slave and free. He didn't say, "Blessed are the super-holy, the experts in Scripture, or the ones who've got life completely sorted out." He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit… the merciful… the peacemakers.". If you want to know what Sainthood really looks like, look to the beatitudes, then look to Bernadette and Carlo. See how people like them, and many others, lived out the beatitudes. Think too of the saints you've known personally, not the ones in books, but the ones whose lives have touched yours. Perhaps a grandparent who prayed quietly every night, or the friend who showed patience and compassion when everyone else had given up, a neighbour who cared for others without seeking thanks, or the prisoner who fixes a broken watch, just because he can. These are the faces of sainthood.

They're people who, in their own ways, have lived out the Beatitudes — who have been merciful when it would have been easier to judge, who have made peace when conflict was tempting, who have sought

righteousness when silence might have been more comfortable. Of course, sainthood isn't about being flawless. Far from it. Every saint, even the most revered, was a person with weaknesses, doubts, and failings. But perhaps that's part of the point. The saints aren't examples of human perfection, they're examples of divine grace. They show us what God can do through ordinary, imperfect people who are open to him. As one writer put it: "A saint is not someone who never sins, but someone who never stops returning to God." That's good for all of us, because it means that we just have to keep saying "yes" to God's love, again and again, even when we fall short. *Especially* when we fall short. To be a saint is not to be lifted up on a pedestal, but to bend down in service. It's to live in such a way that others catch a glimpse, however faint, of the love of God. One of my favourite prayers is that we may be windows through which others may se the love of God. I use it, or a variation of it, often on Wednesday mornings during the Communions services. That's what Bernadette and Carlo Acutis were, windows through which other people saw the love of God.

So may this All Saints' Day, May we, too, be counted among the blessed: the merciful, the meek, the peacemakers, those who hunger for what is right, those who mourn, yet are comforted, those who live with open hearts to the grace of God. And may our lives, in all their ordinariness, shine with the extraordinary light of Christ, as people see through us, to the loving God. Amen.