

Patronal Festival **ALL SOULS**: 03.11.2024 dtw

Today, on this Patronal Festival of All Souls', we celebrate Christ's victorious life lived out in men, women and children throughout and beyond time. Old and young, venerated and unknown, prelates, princes or paupers – all whose lives Christ has touched, informed and shaped, individuals like you and me, fearfully and wonderfully made, carved in the palm of God's hand – ambassadors for Christ, or even simply Christ-like because they did the will of God without articulating faith as such. This great unnumbered company, whose membership is known only to God, is that which we call All Souls.

Before the mind's eye, or as the unseen companions of our deepest aspirations for the Divine Love, they point and lead us ever onward into the heart of God, our true home. Child saints who sang their way to heaven from crosses in Japan or at the stake in Uganda – sped to God in the ardour of youth, confident of a life better than any imagined here. Men and women in the prime of life crowned with martyrdom in the Colosseum at Rome or the death camps of the Third Reich – deeply conscious of life's unfinished business as they cast themselves into the furnace of amazing, sacrificial love. (And this year we are overwhelmed by the thousands of innocents who are dying in the middle east, Ukraine and other parts of our troubled world) Or those who have left the world full of years and love for Christ like St Theodore of Canterbury or Mary MacKillop, Australian Saint – returning the gift of life richly, humbly and wonderfully lived; their eyes fixed on the horizon of that other world of which they had so long been citizens while being simple pilgrims in this one. When Mother Theresa of Calcutta died, I remember reflecting upon the sheer enormity of her earthly task. She was once heard to say, "If I only saw the crowd I would never get started. I see the individual; I minister to the individual, one by one." These are people through whom God's love has shone like the sun through stained-glass windows – people who have made a difference: these are all souls, high and low, big and small, rich and poor. With these we especially include our dear departed loved ones and former worshippers and benefactors of our churches.

Back in 1985, as parish priest of Mt Barker, WA, I had the privilege of conducting the first pilgrimage to the grave of John Wollaston in Albany. (Albany was the setting for a moving ceremony in 2014 exactly 100 years since the ANZAC Convoy from King George Sound to Egypt and thence Gallipoli. Another 10 years have passed. Lest we forget.) Anglicans both from Perth and the south-west of WA honoured John Wollaston, who died in 1856, and was promulgated a Western Australian local Saint and Pioneer of the Church in 1988. Wollaston was Archdeacon of that whole State and his bishop, Augustus Short, was in Adelaide! What a vast archdeaconry it was, and then, with only a horse and cart to get around.

So there, just a small sample of that vast multitude of saints and souls.

In this great company, you and I will gladly recognise those who have exerted some special influence upon us through a common identity of name, or place, or because the beauty and sacrifice of their lives has driven us to our knees in humbleness, gratitude, wonder and joy. People who have been *living beatitudes* to us and for us: poor in spirit, pure in heart, thirsty for peace and righteousness...The very fabric of our Christian existence is woven into the rich tapestry of a life lived in 'the Communion of Saints' – as that most unexplored, even ignored, article of our Creed has it. Generally, we go about our Christian business as if there were no communion of saints at all; it is simply a statement unrelated to life, leaving us to pursue a lonely road unaware of heavenly friends. And yet we surely know that Christianity is not a solo journey. We do it as members of the body of Christ, witnessing and serving on earth, triumphant in heaven. And we do it in fellowship – *koinonia*- the common-unity of one another – in the common-unity of the saints and souls, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Common Prayer describes it as 'the blessed company of all faithful people.' We are not alone!

Yet there are many for whom the Commemoration of All Saints and All Souls will remain a non-event, worlds apart from the commercial triviality of Halloween. It is an irrelevance when all that matters is the here and now, self-fulfilment and consumerism. This is a culture where the one essential ingredient to any authentic saintly journey is totally missing, and that is *sacrifice*. God's love is sacrificial love and our calling to be saints will always come with a cost. It may be a cost to our own ego, our comfort zones, status, finances, time, possessions, ambition; maybe all of the above and more. No doubt some of our memories of faithful departed loved ones capture selfless acts of loving kindness and the fruit of the Spirit. But then, some will be hard memories too; or of things left unsaid or undone, which we still can but offer before the throne of grace, and that peace from God which passes all understanding...a time perhaps to claim blessed Julian of Norwich's words: all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

Whatever our experience, we the living saints on earth are called to such a passion for Christ, whereby God can begin to claim our lives wholly and reflect through them something of divine loveliness - like the souls that you and I have known, through whom God's light and love have shone, and now, upon another shore and in a greater light, are with Christ in Paradise, face to face.

Let saints on earth in concert sing with those whose work is done. Amen