

Fr Paul's Homily

1st November 2009

The Solemnity of All Saints



I returned last Friday evening from a very happy pilgrimage to Israel/Palestine with some of our young people. We visited the place of the Annunciation to Mary, the place of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and the Holy Sepulchre Church on the site of Jesus' death and resurrection. On our way back we travelled through Jordan and visited the place of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist.



We've found it an impressive place. The archaeologists had revealed a vast basilica dating back to the 4th Century. The original builders had diverted the Jordan to make an enormous baptistery in the basilica shaped like a cross. The place of Jesus' baptism had become a place where large numbers of people from the Roman Empire came to be baptised.

And that huge font is one of thousands throughout the world where people have been drawn into the death and resurrection of Christ and have become members of his body the Church.

Today we honour that vast number, which the Apocalypse describes as being impossible to count, who have come into the fullness of life in resurrection. Those who, in the words of St. John in today's reading, have become like Jesus because they see him as he really is.

Men, women and children of every time and place have died with Christ and risen with him into the life of God. In that experience they have come perfectly into the presence of God sharing the relationship that Jesus has with his Father. In this they have found the fullness of life and joy and have been brought to the completion and fulfilment which is the hope of every human being. A hope that every human being knows can never be completed in this life. Our experience on earth is a journey through time and love in which we prepare for the moment when we come with Christ to that great reward in heaven. We are called and enabled by the Spirit to grow in our capacity for love so that one day we shall be able to enjoy perfectly the love of God which is our life.

The people we honour today, the great communion of saints, are all members of the Church as we are and were joined to Christ in faith and hope as we are. Some of them were famous like our own patrons in this parish: St. Peter, St. Stephen, St. Gregory and St. Thomas More and of course the Lord's mother. Some of them have not been formally recognised as saints, which is the point of today's celebration. Each of us will know people who today are numbered among that vast number impossible to count. Perhaps our parents or grandparents, perhaps husbands or wives, perhaps children or babies. All of them people like us with our faults and failings, strengths and gifts.

They have been brought by the goodness of God and the power of his Holy Spirit to the perfection of life and they could not be closer to God, which does not mean they are far away.

In fact, because they are with God, they are closer to us now than they were in life though we may not be completely aware of their presence in our lives. They are our brothers and sisters who now wait for us to join them and who are supporting us with their love and prayer as we continue our journey through life. Because of their concern for us we can ask their prayers in utter confidence that they will be heard.

Those who have gone before us and who enjoy the great reward in heaven fill us with hope and joy. Each time we celebrate Mass they are present with us and we are offered their example as we continue our journey eager to meet them.

On the feast of All Saints we are invited and exhorted to renew our faith in the promise Jesus makes to each of us of everlasting life with God. With massive conviction let us live our lives knowing and believing that one day our joy will be complete with God and with our brothers and sisters who have gone before us.

On the feast of All Saints let us renew our trust in the presence of Christ's Spirit in our lives. Never forgetting that Christ is with us during every moment of life bringing us to a share in the life of the saints which is his promise to us. We take fresh hope from the fact that the saints were just like us, frail, weak and fickle yet they remained faithful to living in trust and confidence in his goodness through the good times and the bad.



When we were in Israel we visited the Mount of Beatitudes. The place where Jesus gave his sermon on the mount which begins with the passage that we heard proclaimed today. Jesus offers us guidance in recognising those gifts which are the marks of those who are disciples of Christ and destined to be saints.

The poor in spirit who live their lives knowing that every gift comes from God and that thanksgiving for his providence is something that must mark every moment of our lives.

The gentle who, filled with respect for every human being, know that each person is made in the image of God and has a right to see in us the gentleness of Christ.

Those who mourn, who hunger and thirst, knowing that the pain of these experiences will give way to the joy that only Christ can give and which comes from sharing his own suffering and pain.

The merciful who are guided in all their relationships by forgiveness and who live in their lives the forgiveness that they themselves have received from God

The peacemakers, who filled with the Spirit of God, become his presence and action when they work for justice.

And those who suffer persecution and rejection knowing that their own humiliation and pain is joined to Christ's who fills our emptiness with his blessings and reward.

Today we join with the saints in heaven as they worship God "Amen Praise and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen"