

## **Feast of All Saints, Year C**

### **Fr Jarred Mercer**

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3.2)

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In Caravaggio's famous painting 'The Martyrdom of Matthew', Matthew is pictured martyred while celebrating mass. Onlookers, including a self portrait of Caravaggio himself, gaze upon the act in terror and pity. Matthew's gaze, however, is turned solely toward heaven. An angel reaches down offering him the end of a branch so as to pull him up out of his misery into the glory of God. We do not see Matthew terrified in his suffering, but rather reaching out for the angel's gift.

From the moment Christ first called Matthew to follow him, when he left everything, included perhaps very great wealth to follow Jesus, his eyes were set only on glory and not the fleeting pleasures of this world. And this is the definition of being a disciple of Christ. This is the life to which we are called. This is what it means to be a saint.

The Christian life is about *vision*. Our aim, our goal and purpose as Christians, indeed as human beings, is to *see*—we are learning to see. Aquinas wrote that the end of humanity 'is to attain to beatitude and that can consist only in the kingdom of God, which in its turn is nothing else than the ... society of those who enjoy the vision of God'.

The saints are our guides, training us to see, pointing the way, trailblazing the path to that *vision* that makes us who we are—that sight which brings about our own beatification, grants *us* beatitude.

'When he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'.

The saints are those who truly see—who see God in Jesus Christ, who see, in the words of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, the 'light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'. So becoming a saint, entering into the light of God's glory, is a turning of our gaze to Christ—to behold the face of Jesus.

Thankfully, we don't have to look very far. The glory that is the end and aim of our lives has met us, has come near, has inhabited our very humanity. Jesus is the perfect love and glory of God meeting us where we are in our every day lives. The love, mercy, goodness, beauty, and power of God are now human realities, they are now 'real' in our world, as they have been lived out in the world by Christ. The possibilities for human life have been expanded, as the life of God has been *gifted* to us in Jesus.

A holy life, a life of beatitude, the life of the saints, is a life lived as the continuation of that gift, and a life that understands that this is a gift meant to be continually given. As Christ has given his life as gift to us, so we give ourselves as gift to the world. But the way this gift is given, the way the glory of God is seen 'in the face of Christ' is revolutionary.

To gain the vision of God, to 'see Christ as he is', is to see Christ crucified and risen. God's great gift of love, God's gift of God's-self to us is not given in pomp and circumstance, but in lowliness, in the midst of our brokenness, sin, and mortality.

Holiness, sainthood, is not something far-off, other-worldly. If it is indeed the continued giving of Christ's love in the world, it is to be found in the experiences we all share in common. The unending love of God makes things holy, makes saints, by touching lepers' wounds, embracing the outcasts, dining with tax collectors and sinners, and ultimately even entering into the tragedy of suffering and death,

so that every part of us, down to our deepest weakness and struggle, is brought into the light of his love and glory. No one of us is left untouched by God's love, and no part of us is left unredeemed.

We, the communion of saints, are a family born out of Christ's sufferings on a fertile cross, bearing forth new life. Saints are made through the humiliation of God. Holy ones are made through the meeting of all that is holy with all that is wretched and broken—as the wretch, the broken like us, turn their gaze to the cross and 'see him as he is' and are transformed into his glorious likeness.

If we are a family born out of Christ's sufferings, with our very nature derived from the cross as our source of life, if we in a sense 'see him as he is', there, in that gruesome place, then to fix our gaze toward glory, to follow the saintly path, might not be we would expect. If the vision of God is found in Christ made scapegoat and victim, where must our gaze turn

today to glimpse of him? Who are those victimised and alienated in whom we might meet Christ?

Those in poverty in our streets? Immigrants cast out as not 'one of us'? Refugees treated as sub-human by this and other nations? The LGBTQ community which the Church has so often so miserably failed to love? Or perhaps estranged loved ones whom we once held dear?

'Christ plays in a thousand place', Hopkins wrote. Our mission as the community of the crucified one is simply to join him.

When Christ births a new family from the anguish of the cross, every aspect of humanity is welcomed into Gods loving embrace.

This is what the lives of the saints have to teach us: not what perfect lives look like; not what it means to live a life without sin or brokenness or failure, but what it looks like when all our imperfections, all our

disappointments, all our deepest sorrows, are united to the perfect love of God; what it looks like when we answer God's call upon us to live as the living presence of Christ crucified and risen in our world, so that even in the midst of our darkest hour, our eyes are fixed on the joyous hope of Christ's glory.

So as we come to be filled with the glorious broken body and poured-out blood of Christ, as we welcome God's love so that it finds its home in us, may our eyes be turned to gaze upon the glory of our risen Saviour, and our lives set towards their final end, to see him as he is, and share with all the saints in the warm embrace of our Father's love.