

Holy Spirit Province

PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

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OUR CALL TO GOODNESS OF LIFE: FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

- For you personally, what qualities must someone possess, for you to regard her or him as a good person?
- Are they different for a man than for a woman?
- Are they qualities that Jesus showed?
- What would you like to change in yourself to be the best person you can be?
- Can you do this on your own?

In today's gospel (Matthew 5:1-12), Jesus gives us his challenging advice on how to be good people. He has told us, in fact, how to be the best people we can be, and about the qualities he wants to see in us, his followers. A quick focus on those qualities shows us that they are the very opposite of common and accepted standards and values.

The world around us says, 'Blessed are the rich, because they can have anything they want.' But Jesus says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' By 'poor in spirit' he means those who put their trust in God rather than money; and those who admit that it is not their income, possessions or bank account that makes them rich in the eyes of God, but what kind of people they are.

The world says, 'Blessed are those who live it up, and never stop having fun.' But Jesus says, 'Blessed are those who mourn.' He means those who let themselves feel the misfortune, pain and sorrow of the hungry, the homeless, the shunned, the orphans, the aged, the tortured, the persecuted, the outsiders, the outcasts and the overlooked, and who respond to them with understanding, sympathy, kindness, compassion, and the most practical assistance.

The world says, 'Blessed are the assertive and aggressive that talk tough and act tough.' But Jesus says, 'Blessed are the gentle.' Gentleness is not weakness, but a form of strength. St Francis de Sales used to say that you can catch more flies with a spoon full of honey than a barrel full of vinegar. In Jesus' book there's just no place for bullies and bullying.

The world says, 'Blessed are those who hunger for power, status, and fame.' But Jesus says, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right.' The only power and status we really need is to keep living in God's way and to keep doing the right thing. More satisfaction and contentment will be found in living with a good conscience than in hanging out with the movers and shakers and wannabes of this world.

The world says, 'Blessed are those who show no mercy and who take no prisoners.' But Jesus says, 'Blessed are the merciful.' Happy are those who make allowances for the faults and sins of others, and whose greatness lies in their ability to forgive. They will receive mercy and forgiveness from God for their own sins.

The world says, 'Happy are those with clean fingernails, sparkling eyes, gleaming teeth, and unblemished skin.' But Jesus says, 'blessed are those with clean hearts.' It's from the heart that all our thoughts, words, and actions flow. If the heart is clean, then everything that flows from it will be clean, as clean as water flowing from an unpolluted spring.

The world says, 'Blessed are those who get even and exact revenge.' But Jesus says, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' Graced are those who spread understanding among people, those who welcome strangers, and those who work for a more just and equal society. They are truly the children of God.

The world says, 'Blessed are those who lie, cheat and steal, and get away with it.' But Jesus says, 'Blessed are those who make a stand for what is right and true.' They may suffer for their stand, but the wounds they bear will be marks of honour and integrity.

Jesus practised what he preached. In his own person he was the beatitudes. Living them day after day made him the thoroughly good person he was. It's the same for us too.

Today's Feast of All Saints is less concerned with the official canonised saints than about all the good and holy people who have ever lived, among them some we ourselves have known, perhaps our own parents among them. None of us, I feel sure, is aspiring or expecting to be a canonised saint. We don't fantasise that one day the pope will tell the world what saints we were. We don't kid ourselves that our picture is going to pop up one day on the walls of churches. Not for a moment do we imagine anyone saying prayers to us or carrying around pieces of us as relics. We don't foresee any statues of us being carried high in processions.

But in its document on the Church, the Second Vatican Council wrote a chapter called 'The Universal Call to Holiness'. A few days ago, on October 10th, a remarkable 15-year-old Italian teenager, named Carlo Acutis, who died of leukaemia in 2006, was declared 'Blessed' in the basilica of St Francis, Assisi. Carlo once said that his life project was 'Jesus'. Surely, his beatification and our Feast today are reminders of our deep-down longings to become better people than we are already, and even the best we can be! Surely too they remind us that Jesus Christ can and will empower us to live what we believe, to practise what he preached!

Surely, then, we won't ever want to stop receiving him as our 'Bread of Life' in Holy Communion, as food for our journey with Jesus, both in life and in death!

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