

Sunday 5th November 2017
All Saints Sunday (A)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Revelation 7.9-end

NT: I John 3.1-3

G: Matthew 5.1-12

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If you would like to spend a meaningful 15 minutes each day next week, may I recommend Neil McGregor's new series on Radio 4, Living with the Gods. As always, he bases his talks on articles to be found in the British Museum and is as ever informative and entertaining.

He began last week by discussing the subject of the dead and he did so initially in the presence of 2 dead people, dead for more than 500 hundred years, mummy bundles from Peru.

It was the custom of the Incas to bring out their ancestors in this mummified form to share in the decision making of the present which would affect the lives of those to come. It was accepted that the dead had something meaningful to offer based on their experience and wisdom from the life that they had lived.

The programme went on to explain that the Incas saw time as 3 parallel lines.

The past, the present and the future running alongside each other so that people would never be disconnected from their ancestors and from their descendants.

As T.S Eliot puts it at the beginning of his poem, Burnt Norton, one of the Four Quartets:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past.

Neil McGregor used the analogy of the bringing out Gladstone and Disraeli to sit around the cabinet table to remind present day ministers of their duty to future generations.

The Incas believed that their community was a seamless one, with the dead, the living and the unborn all playing an important role.

It is a notion which seems initially to be alien and almost shocking to us.

But we talk openly about the Communion of Saints.

In this building alone, there are those who have gone before us, who now reside in the glory of the light of the living God, who are still well remembered, whose influence is still apparent.

In older churches, the dead may well have been buried beneath our feet and not just confined to the grave yard outside.

But even here, in our newer building, there are plaques and memorials to those now live in eternity.

And what of those yet to be born?

My grandmother often used to say of a child when they seemed older than their years that He or she has been here before.

And with our own children and grandchildren,

it is difficult not to think that they were always meant to be, that somehow, they have always existed and were just waiting for the right time to be born.

So that Inca mentality is not so alien to us.

We may not physically bring the dead into our deliberations but we understand their presence amongst us.

If we are to be responsible for this world in the present, we should also have a care for future generations.

The Communion of Saints means that when we receive the body and blood of Christ later in this service

we have a visible sign that shows that we are united with our Lord and through him we are united with all who have been, all who now live in this world and all who are to come.

God exists beyond time and through his presence in us, we too are alive in eternity with all his creation.

We are members of the one body, the Church, made present in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

Today we keep the feast of All Saints,

a day to remember all who have lived their lives in the grace of God,

all those who have been a role model and an influence for good on the lives of others. From the famous and well documented such as Sts Peter and Paul

to those who may or not may have existed,

saints such as St Margaret of Antioch or St George.

Holy people perhaps where myths and legends have grown up around them.

But no matter, their influence has been for good because the portrait of their lives was one which sought to live in the guidance of the Beatitudes.

Today we remember men and women who worked tirelessly for justice for all,

those who risked their lives to bring peace to others,

those who lived quiet lives of prayer and contemplation,

those who lived their lives in the service of others.

And all of them had this in common.

That whatever they achieved was not done so through their own efforts but through the grace of God

because in all things their acknowledged their need of God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Their reward was great and their influence remains.

They have set an example that we can follow,

they have led the way down a path which is now opened to us,

their prayers continue to guide us on our journey to God's kingdom.

We are blessed by the lives of the saints.

Theirs are rich threads in the tapestry of the Church
but each one of us has our own unique contribution to make to the whole picture.
The saints give us hope that we can fulfil our calling.
Through their lives, we can realise that everyone struggles at some point.
They are not plaster saints but real people with moments of inspiration and times of despair just like us.
They were called to be themselves,
to carry out God's mission in their own particular way as God willed.
And their success is our hope and sustenance as we journey on,
as we seek to weave our own thread into the kingdom of God
so that we can be a strength and support for those who are yet to come.

Today we remember that the dead are neither forgotten nor gone.

Lastly let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one. Amen.

The Revd. Michelle Montrose