CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	1 November 2026
Service:	Eucharist, All Saints' Day
Preacher:	The Dean, The Very Revd Dr Edward Dowler

Happy All Saints Day. When I was a curate my training Incumbent used to describe this period of the Church's year, with All Saints and All Souls as the 'winter Easter': a little interval in the year that was full of the hope of the resurrection. I would like to encourage us to think about All Saints Day and the life of the saints more generally on three levels.

The first is that all of us are called to be saints. In the New Testament, the saints (the Greek word for them is hagioi) is the name that is used for the whole Christian community of the baptised. Thus, for example, St Paul writes 'to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi'. This simply means all the members of the Philippian church because all baptised Christians are called to be saints; all of us are called to faithfulness and holiness of life. Some people – and we particularly remember them on All Saints Day – are particularly recognised to be among God's holy people: St Peter, St Paul, St Richard of Chichester and pre-eminently Mary the mother of the Lord. But the vocation to be a saint belongs to us all.

I love the annual reading on this All Saints Day of the Beatitudes from Jesus' sermon on the mount. That sermon which Jesus addresses to an enormous crowd reminds us that the calling to be among God's blessed ones is addressed to all of us. Although it is often hard to be poor in spirit; meek; merciful; to hunger and thirst for righteousness, these are things that any of us can do and to

which all of us are called as we take our places within the whole community of God's holy ones; the whole community of his saints.

Secondly, our Anglican tradition has traditionally emphasised the role of the saints as examples for us to follow. My late grandmother had a well-worn saying that 'manners, morals and ethics are caught, not taught'. We could listen to a hundred sermons or lectures or any amount of other teaching about what it means to be holy, but we would still need to see it in action; still need to see another person modelling it for us.

So, at this second level, the Church gives us the saints as examples for us to follow. St Paul himself in the New Testament says 'be imitators of me as I am of Christ' (1 Cor 11.1). And in the early days of the Church, Christians used to read the acts of the martyrs who had lost their lives under persecution by the Roman Empire. They would find in them examples to follow on which to base their own lives.

We can, and perhaps do, still do this today. For example, we might look to Mary who said 'yes' to God in her own life to learn how to say 'yes' to him in ours. We might look to Jesus' first disciples who, despite difficulties, confusion and setbacks, followed him around the towns and villages of Galilee. We might look to a preferred saint such as St Francis of Assisi, with his thankfulness for the whole created order, or to St Benedict, with his sense of an ordered and stable Christian life. We might look in more modern times to St Maximilian Kolbe or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, giving in different ways their own lives for others during the second World War, showing us how to share in the suffering of Christ. Or Mother (Saint) as she now is Theresa, caring for the poor in Calcutta. Sometimes we look to saints who are far more hidden from view but whom we have known and who have given us an example of holy living. From them, and countless others, we can find examples. They embody the faith so that it can be caught and not just taught.

On a third and final level, the saints who are in God's nearer presence are our living friends. In the words of the preface, they surround our steps as we journey on.

The ancient Greek spiritual writer Plotinus saw the spiritual life as being a journey as he put it, 'from the alone to the alone'. In words that chime with our modern, very individualistic mindset, I am on my own personal journey to God and nobody else is really involved. But the New Testament says differently as we hear in today's reading from the Book of Revelation of the great multitude of the saints 'that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people's and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb'. Shirley Carter Hughson, an Anglican monk of the twentieth century, reminds us that the life of the saints is social: 'if we are in the Body of Christ, in the Communion of Saints, there can be no such thing as solitude for we are continually, and inevitably conscious of the great company of the Blessed, with whom we are one in Christ'.

At this level, then, the role of the saints is not only as examples but as our living friends who accompany us on our journey, support and pray for us. In this cathedral church we are continually reminded of this by all sorts of statues, carvings, stained glass windows, even bits of graffiti that tell us that we are part of this great company. We feel as if they are here with us – and indeed they are!

Sometimes it has been thought that too much emphasis on the saints as our living friends deflects us from looking towards Christ. And through the history of the Church there have perhaps been instances of that. But, for a corrective, look at the icon of St Richard of Chichester that we have here in the Cathedral: he faces towards Jesus who is in the top left hand corner, with his prayer addressed directly to Christ as 'merciful redeemer, friend and brother'. All the other saints point us in the same way. In the words of a wonderful hymn by Isaac Watts:

I ask them whence their victory came:
They, with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to his death.