

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

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SHOWING THE WAY TO HEAVEN

Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God".

Seeing God is what the saints in Heaven do. Today we honor them as we keep our Patronal Festival.

3 weeks ago I was in London and I went to Westminster Abbey. Going to a Service in Westminster Abbey must be the ultimate for Episcopalians. The ultimate in Anglican worship in that magnificent church which has associations with the Church of England and the British royal family.

But this was not just any visit.....it was their Patronal Festival. Friday Oct 13 was the Feast of St Edward the Confessor and I attended Solemn Mass there that evening. The offertory hymn was "Hark the sound of holy voices", which is our offertory hymn today. This hymn was written by Christopher Wordsworth, who was a canon of Westminster Abbey 1844-69.

Next day I returned to the Abbey for Evensong. The anthem sung at that Service was Psalm 47 composed by Orlando Gibbons. Gibbons was organist of Westminster Abbey 1623-25.

How wonderful it was to be at those Services in Westminster Abbey with a hymn and music composed by two of the staff of the Abbey all those years ago.

Westminster Abbey and St Edward the Confessor take us back over 1,000 years to the glory days of the English Church - when the head of state was such a Christian that he was canonized after his death. And it was in the reign of Edward the Confessor that the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham was first set up.

Like my experience 3 weeks ago, we celebrate our Patronal Festival here today. Unlike most churches, we do not have one patron saint - but the whole company of heaven. All those men and women, and children, in every age whom the church declares to be saints. It is sobering to realize that there were more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in any other.

Having all the saints as our patron is a great advantage, with so many encouraging us and praying for us. However it makes the preacher's task more difficult - for whom can he focus on? So today I would like to focus on you!

Have you thought much about your patron saint? Usually this is the person you were named after, or the saint whose day you were born on. My baptismal name is Anthony, so I claim 2 patron saints: St Anthony of Padua and St Antony of Egypt.

When it comes to the day I was born, it was the Sunday after Ascension. It was when the church bell was ringing and my grandmother always said I was going to be a priest!

After I became a priest I had a new patron saint - St John Vianney, the patron saint of priests. Let me tell you a little about him, for he has relevance for All Saints'. He lived from 1786-1859 in France. He had trouble getting ordained as he was uneducated. Eventually he was ordained and subsequently sent to be parish priest of a small village called Ars. It was described as ungodly and the church was in a bad way. But St John Vianney was a wonderful pastor and a holy man. So much so that he was in demand in

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the confessional every day and people came from miles around. He would often be in the church in prayer until late at night. In 1858 over 100,000 pilgrims came to see him.

If you go to Ars you will see a statue of St John Vianney. It is rather unusual, in that his arm is pointing to the heavens. The story goes that as he was making his way to his new parish, he came across a young boy and asked: "Can you show me the way to Ars?". The boy pointed in the right direction and St John Vianney replied: "You have shown me the way to Ars - I will show you the way to Heaven", pointing upwards.

Surely this is the ultimate vocation of a priest, to show us the way to Heaven.

As we gather here today in a church dedicated to All Saints, the future of our parish is a concern for us all. We might wonder what the future holds. We certainly wonder what sort of priest will be the next Rector. Will he not just understand our Anglo-Catholic tradition, but actually love it?

Some may question the place of an Anglo-Catholic parish in the Episcopal Church today. Indeed, I have no doubt that others will say that All Saints' must change.

At this difficult time I think St John Vianney is a special patron saint for you. For surely the purpose of an Anglo-Catholic parish is to point the way to Heaven? To point the way to Heaven through the Eucharist. Here at the altar is the gate of Heaven and our worthy celebration of these mysteries gives us a glimpse. At the heart of the Eucharist the priest says, "Therefore with angels, and archangels, and with all the company of heaven....." And as we join in saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, they are there with us.

The Mass points us to Heaven. Thus the beautiful and regular celebration of this wonderful Sacrament is at the heart of every Anglo-Catholic parish - as it always has been here. Such parishes are noted for their tradition, music, ritual, ceremonial and beautiful churches. These are all used to point us to Heaven. However, any church can have nice music, vestments, processions and incense - but without the truths of the catholic faith, the everlasting gospel of Jesus, those churches are what Jesus referred to as empty sepulchers. Or, as another priest said to me, a country club with hymns!

Of course, the heart of an Anglo-Catholic church is not just High Mass on Sunday, but the quiet daily offering of the Eucharist. Once I was walking through Hillcrest and a young man came up to me and said: "you put on quite a show at All Saints"! I replied: "Yes, it is to show you Jesus". Then I added, "Come to 8 am next time"!

Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart. What is at the heart of every Anglo-Catholic parish is what is at the heart of the Christian life.....prayer. That is what we are all doing for our beloved All Saints'. How wonderful as we celebrate our Patronal Festival to know that all the saints are praying with us and for us!

In searching for a new Rector you want a priest who prays with the saints.

+ Who not only can organize a parish and its worship - but who loves Our Blessed Lord in his heart.

+ Who not only can sing and swing a censor - but who loves the catholic tradition.

+ Who not only can celebrate Mass reverently - but who loves Jesus in the Eucharist.

For if he doesn't love Jesus in the Eucharist he will have a hard time loving Jesus in his people.

And because he loves Jesus in the Eucharist - and in his heart - he will be a man of prayer who will want to offer the Eucharist every day for this parish and its people.

Will he be more at the altar than the computer?

Will he be on his knees in prayer more than planning the latest new project?

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You will want a man who has the heart of a priest - like St John Vianney.
Because, when it's all said and done, it's about the heart.
Don't we know that to be true in our own living the Christian life?

In this context let me quote the American poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson:

What lies behind us?
And what lies before us
Are tiny matters
Compared to what lies within us.

I would like to conclude with a prayer. It is the collect for SS Simon and Jude. I offer it to you as a prayer that you can say daily for this parish and its future. I have said it every time I receive Holy Communion for almost 50 years and I now say it with special intention for All Saints'.

Almighty God,
Who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, Grant that we, following their doctrine, May be made an holy temple, acceptable to Thee, through the same Christ our Lord, Amen

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