

Homily for All Saints Sunday October 31st 2021

Instead of a cloth above Nicaragua there are two photographs, one of Fr Ernesto Cardenal and the other of Sr Maria Romero Meneses, both native Nicaraguans. Sr Maria was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2002 and so is on the official path to sainthood. Fr Ernesto was criticised by Pope John Paul II for continuing as Culture Minister in the Sandanista Government, and is unlikely to be canonised. However many regard him as a saint who tried to live the Beatitudes. Central to his ministry was to encourage people to engage with the scriptures, in order, to use one of his favourite phrases to 'join heaven and earth.'

The opening beatitude speaks of the poor in spirit already enjoying the kingdom of heaven, reminding us that what we call heaven is not just some after death experience but a reality in our lives in the here and now. We might call the poor in spirit those who see beyond amassing possessions or wielding power, or thinking they have all the answers, but who recognise a presence greater than themselves, a presence we would, in the Christian tradition, call God. The Buddhist tradition says that a source of our own suffering can be an attachment to possessions and wanting more. The poor in spirit also recognise that they have a responsibility to other people and for the planet which we inhabit for a relatively short amount of time.

Towards the end of the beatitudes Jesus mentions peacemakers saying they will be known as sons and daughters of God. It is good to notice that Jesus speaks of peacemakers rather than peacekeepers. Those who create opportunities for peace, peace that is not just the absence of war but which respects the dignity and diversity of our planet, of human, plant and animal life forms. This week COP26 brings together leaders from all over the world, hopefully recognising the necessity of seizing the moment to build collaboration instead of competition, recognising that decisions taken by one country can effect the wellbeing of another. They could do well to begin their discussion remembering, in the words of today's psalm, 'The Lord's is the earth and its fullness, the world and all its peoples.' Or to put it another way, we are stewards not owners of our world.

Not much has changed, and the need for peacemakers has never been greater, men and women who have that gentle but strong inner spirit that radiates mercy and a hunger for what is right. People who are not afraid to oppose oppressive regimes, to speak out against injustice, to expose violence and corruption, to work for a fairer distribution of the world's resources, even when this leads to personal suffering and even death. A roll call would include people like Mahatma Gandhi, Rosa Parkes, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and many more.

Today's feast testified to the truth that there are so many saints living among us, 'impossible to count... from every nation, race, tribe and language' as our first reading put it. We might add every faith and none. Perhaps we might include environmentalists among the modern day saints. Today we are encouraged by such a great number, living and dead, canonised and not, who have lived the beatitudes, and we are challenged to do the same. The invitation is to pray the beatitudes often and see which one(s) speak (s) to our hearts in a way that will encourage us to put it/them into practice.

Bidding Prayers for All Saints

Celebrant:

As children of God let us present our prayers with humility and confidence.

Reader:

For the Church – that it may lead people on the path of holiness set out by God’s Spirit for each one of us.

Lord in your mercy

For those who hunger and thirst for justice throughout the world – that their labours may be rewarded.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are persecuted in the cause of right – that they may receive justice.

Lord in your mercy

For the poor in spirit, for those suffering from loneliness or depression, for those whose lives have been challenged to breaking point by dementia – that they may receive the grace of healing.

Lord in your mercy

For Peacemakers, and for those leaders attending Cop26 this week – that their discussions will be based on the Common Good rather than personal gain.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid 19 pandemic, and John Mitchell, Thomas Knight, Eamon Shields, Ellen Murphy, Aiden Edge, Patricia Doran and Florence Parsons whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God we give you thanks for the blessing of all the saints who have inspired us by their holy way of life. Like them we are called to holiness. Guide us on our way and may all that we say and do serve as a blessing on this world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen