

**ALL SAINTS (31st SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME) YEAR A HOMILY 2020
LIFE BE IN IT, ALL TOGETHER**

Mt 5.1-15 Apoc/Rev 7.9-14 1Jn 3.1-3

Greetings all and welcome once more to our Essendon weekend virtual Mass, for the Feast of All Saints and All Souls, for which we'll have a separate Mass for Monday as well, but I like to tie it all in together, as there's no such thing as a perfect saint (*and some were quite eccentric*!), not even you or me at our best, and that's not possible all the time, is it!!

And, with some relief and hope, we see the gradual lifting of restrictions after more than 3 months of lockdown and over 6 months now of unprecedented church closure.

And so we pray together, as we gather again in spirit.

In preparing an appropriate liturgy for my one and only 97 year old aunt Betty's Funeral Mass last Monday, I consulted my sisters Maree and Barbara and brothers Paul and Peter, to see which readings might best suit. Maree proposed today's Gospel, as the Beatitudes express in short and simple terms, just what the priorities of Christian life should be. They pop up regularly as a favourite for funerals, sometimes even weddings. After 43 years of attempting to preach on the theme, I'm still trying!

Early on in parish life in Croydon, I was had a go at, by a disgruntled parishioner, for suggesting they were an upgrade on the Ten Commandments. The latter do tend to focus on the negatives and keeping out of trouble, essential norms for an ordered and civil society, based on faith in a loving God. I never did say they weren't important! Yet, Jesus takes things forward with giant leap into emphasizing the positive elements of living the Christian life, based on fundamental aspects of human need, such as hunger, security, love, truth, peace, empathy, comfort in mourning and loss, and facing up to rejection and suffering, not good in themselves.

There is an implicit responsibility for disciples to be pro-active in reaching out and responding to the needs of others, and sharing our resources, both physical and personal, through our presence in, and engagement with, the lives of others. These are Gospel principles.

Auntie Betty was a quiet unassuming person, ever present throughout my life, never marrying, never driving a car, never doing much exercise, apart from walking everywhere, and never having a great diet, but presumably with a very strong constitution! She never missed a Geelong Grand Final (*since the 1930's and she died the day before this one in 2020, sadly comatose for their 2 big earlier Finals' wins!*), Sunday Mass or Holiday of Obligation, never forgot a birthday, a death anniversary, always had a gift for everyone at Christmas, as well as an annual up-market Easter egg for all members of the family. She was ever-present for family occasions throughout her life, there for weekly Sunday evening dinner and never missed a good funeral, as she would tick off the list those she had outlived. So we did our best to give her a suitable send-off. Most striking were the tributes given by many, including some she had worked with in Telecom over 32 years ago, and the lovely warm and loving words spoken about her by her 6 great nieces and nephews, aged between 23 and 33, about her positive influence on their lives, growing up, and their admiring of her feisty independence, and get up and go spirit all the way.

To my mind, on reflection, Betty quietly and effectively lived in the spirit of the Beatitudes, much as she would never have consciously thought this about herself. As my brother Peter said in his eulogy, her focus was footy, faith and family, in whatever order, but footy with the Cats was sure up there! She even spoke of her ashes being spread around Kardinia Park and Loreto Ballarat, although I am not too sure about those possibilities or legalities! (*She might even have to settle for St Therese's Memorial Garden here in Essendon Bombers' territory!*)

As for today's Gospel, which we have all heard so many times before, it remains up there as one of the great speeches of history, but only ranked 33rd on the Google site I located this weekend. So it has stood the test of

time, as a relevant reflection on how to live life well, and to find happiness in doing so, despite the things that go wrong, and the fact that facing our mortality is a reality for all, like it or not. The question is how to live well in the meantime, in this context, as a believing Christian.

Martin Luther King's "*I have a dream*" (1962), Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Kennedy's Inauguration Address, Churchill's orations are all up there, but the simplicity and brevity of the Sermon on the Mount holds firm and stands out as a charter for Christian life here and now.

The Sermon on the Mount (or the Plain in Luke's Gospel!) is future-oriented in some ways, but not simply about rewards when we die, having lived a virtuous life, in what has sometimes been, wrongly, to my mind, called this veil or valley of tears in life on planet Earth. It is Jesus' challenge to live life fully and as well as we can now, in relation to others and helping to build the Kingdom of God, which he proclaims, in terms of justice, love and peace. We are to make this world a better place because of our presence in it, leaving a positive footprint (not Carbon!), as I like to say.

Pope Francis, on choosing his papal title, focussed on the first Beatitude, concerning the preferential option for the poor, and serving their needs, as a primary Christian responsibility. It doesn't mean giving it all away, but reminds us that we are to share our resources and use them well. We are all that complex mixture of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual beings, trying to find integration and balance in being ourselves and bringing out the best in us and others. There is no room for vengeance, with mercy and compassion to be positive **BE** attitudes reflected in our relationships with family, friends and foe alike, the hard part being the necessity for forgiveness and getting over the hurts we all experience in life at its various ages and stages.

In conclusion, as the Jerome Biblical Commentary puts it: "*Matthew thus transforms a short messianic manifesto into a program of life, a list of desirable qualities or virtues. Each beatitude is composed through synthetic parallelism* (whatever that might mean, but I like the sound!). *All of the rewards will find their realization in the kingdom of God... God will comfort, fill, have mercy, call them.*" As scripture scholar Raymond Brown says: "*This is Matthew's greatest composition... a harmonious masterpiece of ethical and religious teaching.... expressing succinctly the values on which Jesus placed priority.*"

And so, meanwhile, it's up to you and me to take the spirit of the Beatitudes to heart and to apply them to the way we live as faithful disciples, following the example of those who have gone before us, living lives of faith, but not perfection! As we celebrate **All Saints** and **All Souls**, we celebrate their lived faith and the way in which they strove to overcome their weaknesses, imperfections and human failures, in responding to God's grace and Gospel, as we continue to try to do.

john hannon

1st November 2020