

United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

Year A – All Saints

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Stars – Oh how we profit from their presence. NO NO NO!

What makes a saint? Perfection? Pious pleasantness? Constant sunny disposition? I hope not.

I would rather it were authentic humanity, lived in its fullness of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. Painful longing for something beyond ourselves, the separation that makes us long for God-ness. Longing for the fullness of life that we see in Our Blessed Lord.

Isaac Watts: Give me the wings of faith:
*Once they were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears:
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears.*

This is what makes saints, not perfection but wrestling, like Jacob.

Hear the words of Blessed George Herbert wrestling:

*Ah my deare angrie Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.*

*I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve:
And all my sowre-sweet dayes
I will lament, and love.*

Hear the words of Blessed Mother Teresa wrestling:

In my own soul, I feel the terrible pain of this loss. I feel that God does not want me, that God is not God and that he does not really exist.

Hear part of today's Gospel in a translation of Luke's version:

You're blessed when you realise your need of God: God's kingdom is there for the finding. You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry: then you're ready for Messianic food. There's trouble ahead if you think you've got it made. What you have is all you'll ever get. There's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your self will not satisfy you for long. There's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games. There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it. There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others. Your task is to be true, not popular. Love your enemies, live generously. Ask yourself what you'd like others to do for you, and then go and do it for them.

Be naked before the Lord, no pretences, no hypocrisy. Hide not your face from the world, present your face in full glory, in full imperfection, to the light of the Lord. Be honest. And persist. Isaac Watts again:

*They marked the footsteps that He trod,
His zeal inspired their breast;
And following their incarnate God,*

Possess the promised rest.

And if you want to know the way, be pleased to hear what he did say. You and I, sisters and brothers, are the saints of God when we take responsibility for ourselves and do what only we can do.

Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."

Saints sustain us in hope, because they are models for us, and reminders of what is possible for us too through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Stir up Sunday: Christ the King

Year A

Ezekiel 24: 11-16, 20-24

Psalm 95: 1-7

Ephesians 1: 15-23

Matthew 25: 31-46

What sort of kingship is this?

I've ministered to six grieving families this week. I've seen a widow distressed by adult sons imposing their will on her. I've sat in silence with a widower failing to cope with the loss of the love of his life. I've officiated at the funeral of a 37 yr old mother of 5, who dropped dead as she was cooking supper, the family living in a two-up, two-down, and displaying more love and support than I've seen for a long time. I've tried to comfort a pensioner who has lost his mother—a man who selflessly gave up his hobbies and his activities in order to look after her, and is now in his 70s *dreading* having to find a life for himself again. This is nobility, dignity, kingship. This is dignified regal behaviour from people at their most exposed, most vulnerable, weakest.

Is this the kingship of Christ the King? It involves being at the mercy of, and accepting, events that happen. Being passive: the passion. It involves rising above death and desolation to start again. Resurrection and Ascension.

This is not comfortable. It is very stirring up. But the gospel readings of the last few weeks have not been comfortable. All of them have spoken of judgment, of exclusion, of condemnation for those who are too late, or too lazy, or who—as today—do things for the wrong reasons. How does this sit with a faith of comfort, toy services, pet services? How does it sit with a society that considers granting a new identity to someone who murders her 6 yr old son? How does it sit with the oft-heard slogan 'Jesus-loves-me' uttered by the seemingly self-satisfied. These questions are important: failure to grapple with them brings our faith into disrepute; it turns down-to-earth folk away from what they see as the la-la land of Christianity.

Yes, Jesus loves us, but be sure of this: he loves us too much to leave us in our complacent ruts. Jesus the inscrutable, straight-talking, challenging king. Jesus the stern judge. Jesus the critical friend who loves us so much he is ready to admonish and challenge us. AND DIE.

This is a different sort of kingship from any other. And what happens to such a King? Those who believed Jesus to be a king deserted him when he told the truth about his kingdom. Those who feared he might be a king like no other, dressed him up as one, and then did what people always do with those that tell them what they don't want to hear: they killed him. And too late, we saw what we did. It's always too late when I see the consequences of my actions that I kidded myself were done for someone else's sake, but were, in fact and in hindsight, naked self-interest.

The lovers of excellence—*virtus*—are here in today's Gospel. The thing is that they don't realize that they are part of this poor man's kingdom.

'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

They aren't self-conscious of their virtues. They're not seeking their reward in this life; they're not

even seeking it in the next.

And neither should we. Here and now is what matters. When Christ the King, on trial for his life, said his kingdom was not of this world, I suggest that he was NOT saying that his kingdom was of the afterlife, but was telling Pilate that his kingdom was an inner kingdom—a kingdom of outlook, of attitude, of intentionality—that powers our Godly action here and now. A recognition that the trappings of the material world are part of the layers we surround ourselves with in order to make ourselves look big. Spiritual anabolic steroids. Illusion.

The Kingdom of God stands in judgment of all this, of the elites who create and shape domination systems in their own interest, who insist on imposing their will on those who have no need of it.

It certainly is not like any king or kingdom this world has yet known.

- We honour the King when we grow up, and take responsibility for ourselves.
- We honour the King when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, when we welcome a stranger, clothe the naked and visit the prisoner.
- We honour the King when we do all we can to enable those around us to live with delight.

We honour the king when we strive for excellence (*virtus*) for the Divine Lord. When we read, sing, pray, as well as we can. When we put the best of the creative arts, embroidery, flower arranging, music, beauty into worship. When we 'offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee'. What does it say about our view of the King—and of ourselves—if our worship is dull and half-hearted?

We do this to refresh and re-empower ourselves in order to do what we say we will do at the end of the mass—and I assume that we mean what we say—that we go in peace to love and serve the Lord, to bring about his kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

That is how we worship this king of upside-downness. This is stir-up Sunday.