

Christ Church Freemantle

Sunday 1st November – All Saints

Covid Saints and Covid Souls

This year our lives have been very much shaped by the Covid 19 virus. We've discovered many Covid saints in our midst; those who've worked hard to support others plunged into unexpected need because of lost or reduced jobs; all who've been running food banks, offering simple acts of neighbourliness and volunteering in all sorts of ways to ease the difficulties of others. We add to those all the key workers labouring on during the lockdown, and of course the NHS, remembering photos of exhausted nurses coming off lengthy shifts in full PPE. They would probably be very surprised to be classed as saints, yet in their compassion and faithfulness they inspired us and showed us what the love of God is like.

From its earliest days the Church has recognised as its foundation stones those heroes of the faith whose lives have inspired others to holiness and, as a consequence, the Feast of All Saints emerged in the 4th century to celebrate them. Originally it was celebrated on the Sunday after Pentecost so as to provide a link with the gift of the Holy Spirit and the sending out of those who became



martyrs, giving their lives as witnesses for the faith. But in the 8th century the pope dedicated a chapel to All Saints in St Peter's in Rome on 1st November and that became the date for the annual celebration.

Which brings me on to Covid souls, for this year our remembrance on November 2nd of our loved ones who died in past years has been swelled by others who've died either directly or indirectly this year because of the virus. And there will have been yet others who died from various other causes. All are missed and remembered with love. It has been particularly hard on all their friends and relations, especially those who were not able to be with them and hold their hand or give them a hug that said I love you, if they were in hospitals or care homes, and whose numbers were severely restricted at their funerals. There is much unassuaged grief. So our commemoration of the departed is filled with even more poignancy than usual this year. But of course, there will be happy and fond memories to cherish and share too.

And a PS about next Sunday, Remembrance Sunday, which also happens to be the day when the Church would normally remember specifically the saints and martyrs of England from centuries long past. We don't know exactly when Christianity arrived in this country, but the first English saint we know of was St Alban, who was beheaded in about the year 250.

Since then Christians from England have shared the message of the Good News at home and around the world. The Anglican Communion developed out of this, linking peoples of many nations and cultures, individual women and men who have shone as beacons of God's love as they bore witness to their Lord, some simply through holiness and others by giving their lives for Christ. We have so many to remember with thanks as we try to live inspired by their love.

Eileen Wetherell