

**All Saints Sunday 2017 - Blessed are those who simply love
spending time with other people**

“Blessed are the peacemakers”

“Blessed are those who mourn”

“Blessed are the merciful”

These are all quotes of Jesus taken from today’s Gospel reading – But we are meant to be celebrating All Saints’ Day, so why hasn’t the Church given us readings that speak more directly about them?

Well, perhaps these statements have more to tell us about sainthood than we realise. These statements all have relationship with others at their centre. One could translate them this way: “Blessed are those whose pleasure is in serving and trusting in others”... “Blessed are those who simply love spending time with other people”.

Such people will never be lonely, they will always find somebody to be with, after all there are plenty to go around.

As humans, we need each other to survive, and we need other people if we are to find true fulfilment. We cannot be fully rounded human beings on our own, we are designed to live together.

That may, in fact, give us a real insight into what heaven may well be. To enter heaven will certainly involve being able to enjoy the company of everyone else there. No place for envy or hatred or prejudice. There certainly won’t be much privacy.

To be able to live for an eternity like that takes time and practice, it doesn’t just happen on its own. As a child of the enlightenment born into

a western culture, the principles of personal privacy and autonomy have been bred into me from a very young age – indoctrinated into me, if you will. But if we take a step back a little and step outside of our culture, we can see just how challenging principles of privacy and autonomy can be to the building of community. That is why nations that do not hold these principles so highly seem to find it easier to build stronger communities at a local level, even if they are often poorer.

In the West, we have learned to allow a greater degree of privacy and autonomy in an attempt to simply allow each individual to co-exist, but often it means that if we can talk of living in community at all, it is often fractured and only on our own terms. Community is not simply co-existing; it can only be built upon deep ties of relationship. Therefore, to live in a real community, our needs and desires need to be balanced with the needs and desires of everyone else in that community. When communities go wrong, it is nearly always because one or more members have forgotten the need for compromise and have pursued their own will at the expense of other people. So to build a truly rich and diverse community means letting go of our wilfulness. We simply can't have it all our own way.

Heaven is no different. Heaven gives us the ultimate model of community and it is one that has to balance my will against everyone else's. I can't be selfish about my desires or else heaven simply cannot work. Heaven is a community where everyone is equal without privilege. So to enter it means me having to share everything I am and give up a little of my wilfulness and autonomy for the good of everyone else. Of course, I can do this because I am in the full knowledge that I am safe in heaven to do so.

In other words, Heaven will be the the place where I am finally able to hand everything over into God's care, just as everyone else has handed everything over into God's care. Then, what I am left with, is to just sit back and enjoy everyone else's company.

Blessed are those who simply love spending time with other people.

And that is how today's readings become so poignant to today's feast of All the Saints.

The saints, all those currently living in heaven, are those people who, irrelevant of their good or bad points on earth, now live in perfect harmony with one another and God. This is far beyond any human authority to judge. They number far more than just those who have already been recognised formally as a saint by the Church on earth. They include are all those who have managed to let go of the things which get in the way. They have let go of all the pride and anger, all the longing for power and control. They have handed everything over to God to take care of. And now they bask together in God's radiating presence.

Blessed are those who simply love spending time with other people! In this way, we are all called to be with All the Saints too.