Homily for people and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 1st November 2026 (All Saints')

Readings: **Revelation 7:9-17** **Psalm 34:1-10, 22**
1John 3:1-3 **Matthew 5:1-12**

Ten years ago, Pope Francis formally recognised Mother Teresa of Kolkata as a Saint, during a service attended by more than 100,000 people. Mother Teresa was a person of tremendous faith, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her leadership work with the most marginalised in Indian Society

On this All Saints' Day, we might wonder what it is that makes a 'saint'? Do we have to work with the poor in India like Mother Teresa, or can it be for something different?

Interestingly, the Catholic Church will not start the review process for considering someone a saint until they've been dead for at least five years, and there have been at least two documented miracles attributed to the person!

For years, I thought that saints were like Christian superheroes who have been extraordinarily faithful. Women and men who have been inspired by God, and sustained by the Spirit, to bring light, hope, and justice to the context in which they lived.

Earlier this year I spent three days in the Italian city of Sienna and during this time I visited the home of St Catherine. It was interesting to see paintings which reflected key elements of her life and faith journey; and to think about the influence she had in fourteenth century Italy. It was then confronting to look at her mummified head in the Basilica of San Dominico, and watch people lighting candles before praying for her intercession!

We can helpfully think of Catherine of Sienna and Teresa of Kolkata as 'Saints' using a capital 'S' for they were each faithful, they have died, and they have each been formally recognised by the Roman Catholic Church.

In the New Testament however Paul used the term 'saint' in a very different way. He wrote *'to the saints'* in Ephesus, Philippi, and Corinth, and sent greetings *'from the saints'* he was living with when he wrote his second letter to the Corinthian church. For Paul, then, 'saints' – with a small 's' - were living people. People whose lives were characterised by their love of God, their faith in Christ, and their compassionate response to those in need.

With this definition, I suggest that each of us could be considered 'saints' with a small 's', for we are each people who seek to follow Christ.

However, before we feel too comfortable with that notion, I think it's important to acknowledge that following Christ is not easy – and that some of the things Jesus asks of us are hard.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus is remembered saying, *"Love your enemies, (and) do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, (and) pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strike you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.* ***Do to others as you would have them do to you.****" (Luke 6:27-36)*

The direction to do to others as you would have them do to you is often called the Golden Rule and it is found in many religions. However 'loving our enemies and doing good to those that hate us' is unique to Jesus and it is counterculturally hard. 'Blessing those who curse us, and praying for those who abuse us…' is also uniquely Jesus, and seems a little mad!

When confronted by threat our biological response is a rush of adrenaline that empowers us to fight or run away. Surely fighting back is understandable. An important part of Old Testament Law supports this and suggests that for justice to be done there has to be an eye for an eye, and a tooth for tooth (Exodus 21:23-25). What's wrong with that?

Two problems are proportionality and escalation. You hit me, and I'll hit you back. But I'll hit you back twice as hard! You hit me back twice as hard, and I'll hurt your whole family. You hurt my family, and I'll target your extended family... Before we know where we are a small conflict has become a war.

In the direction from Jesus for us to love our enemies there is something very new which is rarely applied at a macro, international relations, level.

Love your enemies – don't beat them into submission! Don't destroy them until there's nothing left, rather… do good to them! Bless them and pray for them! It sounds like a sure recipe for failure, and at one level it didn't serve Jesus well. He was a popular leader with a significant following but he did not say, 'Let's take over the Temple, because the authorities are corrupt!' He did not say, 'Let's take up arms against the Romans because they are the occupying enemy!' Instead, he challenged them, and they crushed him. He was tortured and executed, and they thought that was the end of him.

But his death was not the end. We believe that he rose from the dead, met with the disciples on a heap of occasions, and commissioned them to continue the work he had begun. It was costly then, and it has always been costly. Corrupt authorities do not like to be challenged. Self interested people resist change.

On this Feast of All Saints', we can look back and give thanks for the faithful individuals who have been used by God to remind Church and Society that there is another way. People who have affirmed that God's Kingdom challenges powerful economic and political systems that oppress and deny life. We can give thanks for the care of Mother Theresa in India, the wise counsel of Catherine of Sienna in Italy, and the many saints through history who have kept the faith.

I wonder who the 'saints' have been in your life journey, and mine? Who have been the people who inspired us by their example to better live lives of faith? Godly people who inspired us by the quality of their living, guided us with their teaching, and loved us… even when we were difficult to like?

I think these are among the 'saints' we remember and give thanks today. And, as we give thanks for them, can we ask God for the grace to be as faithful, hope filled, and loving in our own contexts of time and place… for, with a very small 's', we are the saints.

Let's pray…

"Faithful God, you have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses: grant that we, encouraged by all the saints, may persevere in running the race set before us, until at last we attain your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen"