

Dear Friends,

We are coming up to All Saints Day and unusually this year it falls on a Sunday. That doesn't happen very often, presumably once every seven years.

There's one thing that it's important to say right at the start. In the New Testament the saints aren't just the elite, they aren't just a few super-spiritual people who are better than everyone else. In the New Testament the saints means all Christian people. Paul often refers to the saints, he talks about the saints at Rome, the saints at Corinth, the saints at Ephesus. What he means is all the Christians in that place.

At All Saints we remember all the faithful Christians of the past, not just those with an official title, not just those who are well known. John Wesley believed that All Saints was important. He thought it was important because Methodism doesn't celebrate saints days, so All Saints stands in for the rest, so that we are reminded of those who have gone before us and their witness to the faith.

On All Saints Day we remember the faithful Christians of the past, and it's important that we do so with the right attitude. We are here today because of the saints, the ordinary faithful Christians of past years and previous generations. If they hadn't kept the faith we wouldn't be here today. Without them the church wouldn't exist today. The church depends on the faithful witness of ordinary Christian people down through the centuries who have built the church. There is a well-known saying of St Teresa of Avila "God has no hands but our hands" to do his work.

Faithful Christians of the past have kept the Christian faith alive even at times of great difficulty. That is true in a general sense but it's also true in a much more personal way. We can each remember those who have helped us personally, those who have guided us and led us into the faith. We remember those who have brought us into the church, many of whom have now gone to be with God. We are very thankful as we look back and remember those who taught us, those who showed us what it means to be a Christian.

We are all where we are today because of the influence of Christian people, many of whom have died. But their influence isn't just something that lies in the past, the influence of these Christian people lives on in the present, they live on through us. As we travel on our journey of faith we know that we aren't alone. We know that the way won't always be easy, at times it will be a matter of endurance, of keeping going when the way gets difficult. We have each other, we can help and encourage each other, we can learn from one another. We also have the encouragement of those who have travelled this way before us and have already reached the end of their journey.

We are each on this journey of faith and we keep moving onwards, which is why it's important to see the past in the right way. The past is a part of us, it has made us what we are. Our memories of past Christians can encourage us and give us new heart at those times when we feel the going is getting too tough. Those who have inspired us in the past give us the courage and determination to keep moving on our journey of faith.

Best wishes,

Mark