

All Saints

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on 3 November 2019

Readings: Ephesians 1 vv 11-end and Luke 6 vv 20-31

Recently, outside St Peter's basilica in Rome, there was a remarkable ecumenical event. But it is only through God's grace and the passing of the years that we can see it in that way.

John Henry Newman was an Anglican priest and academic, who, in his early years, was an evangelical with Huguenot ancestry on his mother's side. Newman became known as a leader in, and an able proponent of, the so-called Oxford Movement, an influential and (at the time) controversial grouping of Anglicans who wished to return to the Church of England many traditions and liturgical rituals which were familiar and universally accepted before the English Reformation. These are accepted without question in the majority of Church of England parishes today. The Oxford Movement had considerable success; many of the practices we take for granted today owe their revival to the resurgence of English spirituality in the first half of the nineteenth century, during which the Church of England awoke from the comfortable slumbers and lassitude of the eighteenth century. Church buildings, including many here in Guernsey, demonstrate the principles of nineteenth century revival in the way that they were redesigned and reshaped during that century. St Andrew's church experienced possibly one of the most thorough Victorian makeovers of any of the Guernsey churches. St Stephen's church is a very clear example of a church built in accordance with the principles of the Oxford Movement.

And yet, in 1845, Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church and in 1879, he was made a Cardinal. In 1865, he wrote the poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*, set to music by Sir Edward Elgar, from which come two hymns that easily crossed the religious divide of the nineteenth century: *Praise to the holiest in the height* and *Lead, kindly light*. Newman's last sermon as Vicar of Littlemore, near Oxford, had the theme of 'The parting of friends'. The personal consequences for Newman of becoming a Catholic were great: he suffered broken relationships with family and friends, and attitudes to him within his Oxford circle of friends became polarised.

On 13 October 2019, Newman was canonised, that is formally declared by the Pope to be a saint. It is a significant sign of how far we have moved that Anglican bishops and priests, including the current Vicar of Littlemore (incidentally, a woman) were given a place of honour at the service in the Vatican.

In his concern to remind the Church of the universal call to holiness, Pope John Paul II added more names to the list of saints than any previous Pope, and possibly more than his predecessors combined. During his long pontificate, over 1000 men and women were declared 'blessed' and 482 were declared saints. The Church doesn't 'make' saints – nor does the Pope. Rather, the Church *recognises* that some people have lived their lives in such a way, so close to God, that they *are* saints.

The Anglican Communion does not have a formal procedure for declaring that certain men and women are saints, but our calendars have always included certain men and women whose lives are examples of Godly living and who have done much to enrich the life of the Church and to encourage Christians to follow their examples and ourselves grow closer to God. The calendar in the Book of Common Prayer dates from very soon

after the Church of England's break with the Papacy, and so most of those included are formally 'saints' of the undivided Church. But we recognise that God's gracious gift of holy men and women did not cease at the Reformation in the 1500s; and so later revisions of the calendar have added the names of more people, some from the twentieth century, whom we are encouraged to remember because of their lives of holiness and Christian commitment. Newman has been remembered in our calendar for a number of years.

Some people argue that Pope John Paul II, who was himself declared to be a saint in 2014, had 'devalued the currency' by declaring so many men and women either 'blessed' or 'saints'. Perhaps that's true in so far as there's no way that so many people can truly be remembered and valued across the whole church. But many of them will be remembered particularly in the communities where they lived and worked – and so it is not so very different to what has happened across the Anglican Communion. In the British Isles, there are local commemorations in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, of people whom we don't formally commemorate in England. Many Cornish churches are dedicated to saints little known, if known at all, outside a very local area – following the pattern of Wales and the other Celtic communities. I knew nothing of the Channel Islands saints, Samson, Helier, Magloire, Tugual and Branwalader (also known as Brelade) until I moved to Guernsey four years ago.

Many dioceses have recognised that there are also local people, known and still remembered in their own communities with deep affection and gratitude, whose significance hasn't spread beyond those communities.

This parish has been shaped significantly over the centuries by the lives and faithfulness and prayers of many people. The majority are the lay people who have been faithful to God and who have lived lives of generosity and care and encouragement – who have left, as it were, an imprint in this church and this community. And they remind us that God keeps on making saints – he continues to call us to live lives of faithfulness and generosity.

In every country and in every generation, God still calls people to follow him and to be his saints – shining witnesses of his love and care for humanity and of the way in which he wants us to live in relationship with each other. It may seem easier just to follow the lazy way of the world, following the crowd. But once we hear the call of God, once we see the better way (as St Paul describes it in his first letter to the Corinthians) - the way of love, it is difficult to resist. This is the experience of the saints, of God's people in every age.

It is, perhaps, our experience today - however reluctant we may be to face the true cost of following in Jesus' way. Because that means a change to what we do, to how we spend our money and use the material resources that God has given to us, to how we live our lives. It requires great generosity from us – but even that is so little in comparison with the generosity of God and the generosity of the saints in every age, who have given everything, often including their very lives, and whose characteristics Jesus describes in the gospel reading we have heard today.