

- Are saints rich people or poor people?
- Saints. What do you make of them? Uniform: a halo; Facial characteristics: a beatific smile, heated slightly tilted to one side and pointing upwards, a far away look in their eyes; Dress code: long robes, usually one colour only; Their relevance: remote; Typical names: not usually called Shane or Courtney
- Is All Saints' Day a liturgical anachronism, totally unrelated to life in 21st Century Britain, or has it got something to say to us? And, as I said earlier, are saints rich or poor?
- As so often, when we want to get to grips something Christian faith centred we do best to start with the bible.
 - This morning's reading from Ephesians contains some stuff about saints.
- When St Paul writes '*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints*', I don't think he is talking about a New Orleans football team. Neither do I think he is just talking about people like St Margaret of Antioch who was swallowed by a dragon, or even St Mary the Virgin, the mother of Jesus. It seems much more likely to me that he is complimenting the young Church at Ephesus on their loving relationship with living people who they feel they have some connection with. '*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints*' Love towards other new Churches, other new Christians as well as those who have been Christians for a long, long time.
 - Apply it to yourself. '*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints*'. Could St Paul say that of you? What would be the evidence?
- Here's another mention of saints in the same reading. The '*he*' in this passage is clearly Christ. Paul says to the Christians in Ephesus, '*you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints*'. What is it that Christ has inherited and what does this inheritance mean for us?
 - Well, once he was raised to new life on Easter Day, Jesus ascended to his Father to become King of all creation, the new creation. As we read at the end of the passage, '*he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*.' The King of creation, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, that's his inheritance. We, the saints are his body, his life on earth. That's our inheritance, or at least the first part of it.
- So let's get this straight. A saint is a person who is a follower of Christ. You and I are therefore saints. Warts and all. (LOOK AROUND) And there's quite a lot of warts! We are '*God's own people*' as St Paul says earlier in the reading. And the body of Christ stretches both earthward and heavenward. Saints are living in the world today and also are living in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The biggest, fastest growing, longest lasting, farthest reaching all-encompassing family organization in the whole of the universe. Our inheritance will be to live fully with Christ, redeemed and made whole by the cross and the resurrection, in the kingdom of God where earthly values are turned upside down and all that seems reasonable and our rights today will be exposed for the tawdry grasping truth of what it is. Self-interest rather than God focused.
- I think St Paul could easily have got a job today writing regulations for a Government department but now the first sentence of this complicated reading, makes sense, '*In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory*.' God focussed rather than self-interest!
- There's huge amounts more we could say about this extraordinary passage but instead I want to ask you a question and then focus on the other reading.
- What does it mean to live for the praise of Christ's glory? Are these just pious words, or does it actually mean something?
 - To get an answer, let's turn to the Gospel. God focused rather than self-interest!
- And for me the key sentence, really because it is the most difficult to understand and therefore the most challenging is the first sentence of all. '*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God*.'

- It what sense can we ever suggest that the poor are blessed. How outrageous would it be to stand outside a refugee camp, and mention to a man whose life has been literally torn apart by warfare, as you pat him on the head, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'? Would it make him feel better? I think not. Would it feed him. I suggest not. Would he want to hit you? Very probably!
- How can we have the gall to suggest that poverty stricken families, whose Universal Credit delay has meant they have to go to a Foodbank, are blessed? Is that not just lazy theology?
- I haven't got a full answer to this question. But maybe when we receive our full inheritance of the body of Christ in the Kingdom of God, we will see the fallen world we live in at the moment through different spectacles and it will make more sense.
 - However I do have a few insights from the context to this verse.
- First, listen to it with the few words previously written in.
 - *'Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'*
- Jesus is talking to his disciples. He is talking to us, his followers. Saints. Not the world at large.
- Are saints rich people or poor people?
 - Well, if you consider your life your own, not Christ's. If you use your resources for your own well being, not Christ's. If you aim first at self-interest rather than something more God focused, then you are more likely to be rich in worldly terms but poor in spiritual riches. The kingdom of God is not likely to be part of your everyday thinking.
 - Whereas if you are sacrificial in your giving, your time, your energy and your self-esteem, being more prepared to show love for all the saints than to pay for that extra holiday in Timbuktoo, then you are more likely to be poor in earthly terms but rich in the inheritance of the Kingdom of God.
- So the answer to the question are saints rich or poor, is yes they are! But is this the limit of this earthshattering statement? *Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'*
- The wider context of this verse is that Jesus has just been rather busy. He has allowed his disciples to glean grain from the cornfields on the Sabbath. You would only really do that if you were poor. He has healed a man with a withered hand. This man would have been poor in earthly terms, presumably unable to work at anything manual.. And he has healed many from a great crowd surrounding him. They would surely all have been poor. Because if you were ill and unable to work, you starved. So all these poor would have been blessed. They would all doubtless have said they had come into contact with the Kingdom of God.
 - But that seems to be a rather historical and restricting truth. If this beatitude stretches no wider then we can relegate it to history or to those fortunate who think they have been healed by Jesus.
- It seems more likely that Jesus is talking to those who are materially poor today. But in what sense could they possibly be called 'blessed'?
- It is true that the Gospel, and in particular Luke's Gospel, has a downer on the rich and powerful.. Maybe from Jesus' perspective as the King in his Kingdom of God, the rich are so encumbered with responsibilities and choices, with burdens and pleasures, with duties and worries about what they've got, that they have no space for the Kingdom. Just try telling that to a beggar in the street! Perhaps those who have riches in Kingdom terms are those who can see Christ clearly, who have little of their own to cloud their vision?
 - St Paul writes about vision in today's reading, *'I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints'.* So just perhaps St Paul agrees.
- So this becomes a secret Beatitude. Worthy to live by and to work towards and a way to 'live for the praise of his glory', but not wise to shout out loud lest the poor who have such great need feel patronized.
- 'Are saints rich people or poor people?' How would you answer that question?
- And is it the same question as 'Are you rich or poor?'
- And what does your answer to that challenge you to do? Happy All Saints' Day! Amen.