

St Columba, 31 October 2010
All Saints Sunday

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Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

Who are they, these saints?

A couple of weeks ago Mary McKillop was made a saint by Pope Benedict XVI.

I met Mary McKillop, well her pictures and the story about her, because the religious order she founded still has a house in Mission Bay. I used to go on retreat there. They are called the Sisters of Joseph of the Sacred Heart and they used to wear brown habits that led to them being called the Brown Joes!

Mary McKillop was working amongst the very poor in Australia, and NZ, in the second half of the 19th C. (1867).

Mary McKillop opened 10 schools and care centres for poor children. The Sisters lived in the community with the people they were working with, and lived like them: poor, without much money or many possessions.

By 1871 there were 170 Brown Joes working in 70 schools. In the same year she was excommunicated by the Catholic bishop of Victoria, in Australia, after some political manoeuvring by male priests who were unhappy that the Brown Joes had informed on one of the priests for abusing children. So even saints are not always the favourites of the church!

She was reinstated by the same bishop in 1872 when he was dying!

Making saints is not something that our Anglican tradition has done.

That is, we have not singled out individual people and given them special status in the church – saint status - so that we call them Saint Keith or Saint Barry, or Saint Lope. We do have Saint Columba, after whom this church is named, and a few like him, but they were made saints by the Roman Catholic church way before the Anglican Church came into being in the 16th C.

I am not really sure if the church *makes saints*, or gives permission for special people to be *called 'saint'*. Either way these sort of special 'saints' are established by the Church whether they are made or called – the church chooses them and decides what part of their life is special enough to allow them to be added to the small list of people who are given the title 'saint after they die.

Some people think that if these saint people are petitioned in prayer, they can change the physical nature of the world and make miracles happen!

On All Saints Sunday, which is today in our Anglican Church calendar, we could spend time considering all these special people who have been made, or called saint by the church through history. But that would be to miss the point of it all.

To find the point, we have to take another look at the Gospels and the letters written to the early church that make up the New Testament.

What we should all be seeking, according to these holy writings, is wisdom and insight (Not miraculous powers!).

The wisdom we seek is *to know that we are already special people* - inheritors of the love and justice of God - and wisdom enough *to know that this love and justice will bring health and healing*.

But, and this is the tough bit -with a little effort we can develop the insight required by the people of the earth to know *how we should live* so that this inheritance that is ours is used appropriately. If we figure out how to live the gift of love and justice that we have received – then we do become saints of God too whether or not the hierarchy of the church knows who we are!

But, if we don't use the wisdom and insight that let us know how to love and what need to be done to bring justice to the earth - well it 'gets locked back in the vault' so to speak until we are ready... But we need to remember we are never disinherited ... that's what it means to be a child of God.

We've been hearing how the writer of Luke (who we heard last week was probably not called Luke) likes to set one group over against another, and likes to use contrast in his stories to make his message clear, well in today's reading he is doing it again. He is setting up *the woes and the blessings*, contrasting one thing with another:

- Blessings to you – who are poor, hungry, weeping, hated and excluded, *God will add to you what is needed*.
- Woe to you - who are full, satiated, laughing and admired, *God considers you have enough already*.

We are offered these contrasts, and the passages which follow, to help us choose who we should stand alongside; where the love of God needs to be demonstrated and where the justice of God is in need of some work; who or what it is we should be supporting.

These blessings and woes sit amidst the other healing passages in Luke and they point us *not* towards 'making individuals better' but towards the 'healing of the people', communities of people. And this includes the setting to rights the social systems and structures of community in which people live and work.

The Christian code word that is often used for all this healing and restoring activity is 'salvation'. So when we participate in putting to rights what has gone wrong amongst us, we are engaging in acts of *salvation*; we are restoring into community people who have become isolated, we are healing breaks in relationships, setting to rights our connections with others, and engaging with the life-giving energies and powers that we know as God (some call this another code word for all these things that I am speaking about).

Throughout the Bible and our Christian history there have been people who have modelled for us this sort of loving and justice making way of life and attitude to community.

These people are our saints whether they are alive like Nelson Mandela or dead.

They are the ones who model for us the 'how to' in our own time and place and we can be saints too - with a little wisdom and insight and time given to reflecting on the words and ways of Jesus to show us how.

I like our Anglican tradition; it acknowledges that we can all be saints.

We might be saints with a little 's' but try it out on yourself and consider how it feels to call yourself saint....

- Say in your mind saint....
- What can you identify as your special characteristic that models the way of Jesus and reflects the 'god' you are acknowledging...
- What would you like others to say about you ...
- To remember about you ...
- To celebrate about you ...

The letter to the early church in Ephesus celebrates those who *love all the saints*, loves all the ordinary people. The writer's prayer for them is that they will have *wisdom* and *enlightenment* for the eyes of the heart - or we might say *insight* - so that they will know the riches of the gift of love.

So for all of us here today, the *saints of St Columba Grey Lynn*

May we find

- the way of justice in our lives, and the strength to uphold it
- The generosity to love abundantly
- The wisdom to know we are inheritors of the loving care and healing of the energies of God
- And the insight to know how to live with openness and compassion amongst all the saints so the gifts of love and healing are spread as widely as possible.