

SUNDAY BETWEEN 2 & 8 OCTOBER, Year C Responsibility: Canon Barlow [Based on the Gospel for today viz.: Luke 17:5-10]

"So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say: 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" (Luke 17:10)

From time to time we, as a nation, find ourselves up against some disaster or threat of disaster - drought may be, or bushfires, or flood, or thankfully more rarely, the threat of war. At such times we may be urged as a community to call upon God for alleviation or protection from the threatening catastrophe. Such calls to national prayer seem a bit odd when you consider that we are hardly a Christian nation as a whole, and it suggests that if we can muster sufficient people to prayer, we might persuade or cajole God to do something about it. On the other hand there is undoubtedly great good in drawing the attention of the community to an acknowledgement of our utter dependence upon Almighty God. But if God's answer is "No!", what then does that say to the semi-believer and sceptic about the power of prayer?

Behind our cry to God in times of difficulty and worry – either as a nation or as an individual - must lie the strong and confident faith that God can and will help us. What must be stated straight away is that although we might pray God to relieve our need and distress on some specific situation, even asking with the greatest faith in God's ability and willingness to accede to our prayer, we must also have the faith to recognise that God might not answer in the way we expect, or in the time we desire. God is not like the genie in Aladdin's lamp; He is not **our** servant; we are His! We must allow for His purposes to be fulfilled, and they will not always co-incide with ours.

Faith implies a steadfast loyalty, a holding on in obedience to God's laws, even when apparently it pays no dividends. As we lay our needs and our desires before God in prayer – as Jesus taught us - we are quite right to ask in expectation, and we are to continue to worship and serve God steadfastly, obediently and trustingly. That is, in faith, faithfully.

In the Gospel for today we heard the disciples asking Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus did not reply to that petition directly, and in fact the request, the prayer was not granted until after the Resurrection! For Judas Iscariot, who presumably was among those who asked, the request was denied – or if his faith was increased, it was insufficient to save him from betraying Jesus. Instead of answering and granting the request then and there, as He did in answer to the request: "Teach us to pray", Jesus simply made the comment, using a deliberately absurd illustration, that great things can be achieved through faith. In the parable which follows about the relationship of a master and a slave, Jesus points out that we are not to suppose that faith, and the obedient service we offer as an expression of our faith, establishes a claim for reward. "When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!"

This is not an easy lesson to learn, nor is it a popular one. We all like to be thanked for our good deeds and even given a little "Thank you" gift. Many of us probably have at the back of our minds the idea that if we do the right thing by God, then He will be obliged to do the right thing by us! And that includes of course Him doing our will, answering our prayers in the way we want them answered, and right away too, not in the dim future. But as St. John wrote: "We love, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Not "He loves us because we first loved Him!" He initiates, we respond.

The Jews thought that they could secure credit with God by a meticulous keeping of the Commandments. Goodness was considered in terms of credit and debit entries on a balance sheet. If a man fulfilled enough good deeds to offset his bad ones, then he was in the clear with God. People still tend to think this way, as if God keeps a big register with ticks and crosses against our names. Too many crosses and you fail and go to hell. Sufficient ticks and you're O.K. for heaven.

We cannot put God in our debt – that is a wholly wrong way of thinking. Our relationship to God is our response to what He has done for us in Christ. The more we are aware of the love of God for us, the more freely-given will be our worship and our service. When we begin to understand God's boundless concern for us, we know that we cannot say: "I've done my duty; now I will stop and let somebody else do it." There can be no limit to what we do in response to God's love. When we become aware of placing limits on what we are prepared to do or give in the service of God, we should then carefully consider our relationship with God. When we begin worrying how much or how little other people are giving financially, or how much or how little other people could do and should do, and we feel "put upon" - then we should pause and reconsider: Why are we doing what we do - as our share? Our share is the most we can give of time treasure and talent, and that bears no relationship to what anyone else is doing.

Days of national prayer ought not be seen as a mighty effort to bring pressure on an unwilling or reluctant God, to talk Him into doing something for us. It should be rather an acknowledgement that His is the power and the control and the wisdom, and that we are utterly dependent upon Him for our whole life and sustenance. To live by faith is to go on trusting God's overall wisdom and righteousness.

In past times, 'calamities' like drought and flood and famine and invasion by hostile armies were read as signs of God's displeasure. Modern knowledge identifies the causes scientifically and geographically and historically and gives them names like E1 Nino or Cyclone Fred. It would not do us any harm, and would upgrade our nation's ethics, if people read into them that God maybe trying to remind us that we have erred and strayed from His ways and that even though we know the cause of some disaster, we should take the hint and amend our ways.

Of course God answers our prayers - but not in any simple "ask and get" way. We must recognise that our ways are not necessarily God's ways, and our wills are not necessarily God's will. He is Lord of all and we must conform our wishes and desires to His, being prepared to be overruled when our vision is limited and our desires selfish.

This is to walk in faith, and as we walk in faith, so will our "faith increase. And when we have done all that is commanded, we will **still** have done only what was our duty.

AMEN

SUNDAY BETWEEN 9 & 15 OCTOBER, Year C Responsibility: Canon Barlow

[Based upon the Gospel for today, viz. Luke 17:11-19]

"Then Jesus said to him: Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:19)

Jesus had cured all ten lepers. They had all been made "clean". But the thankful one had also been made "well". The word used in the King James version is "whole" - "thy faith has made thee whole". And this is probably nearer the true meaning of the phrase, even though several translations agree on the word "well". However the Jerusalem Bible phrases it as "Your faith has saved you." And the New English says "Your faith has cured you". Each translation is legitimate - most words have shades of meaning, and translations from other languages are always open to a variety of slightly differing words. It doesn't destroy the truth of the Scriptures - in fact many incidents are given a much richer and fuller meaning as we look at the terms used.

As in this case. The grateful leper was made whole; he was made well; he was cured; he was saved. And each translation agrees that it was his faith that made him whole, well, cured, and saved. The thoughtless nine were also cured and made clean - there is no suggestion of our Lord's revoking their healing. They were healed and would remain healed - that is an indication of the love of God, even towards ungrateful men and women.

Some years ago, the Church was called to pray for the breaking of a long period of drought. In a certain Parish, as it happened, the rain began falling some hours before the first formal prayers were uttered! God got in first! Some people had been praying for weeks previously, and, strikingly, their prayers had not been granted until the day appointed for a general Day of Prayer for rain. There were others who hadn't prayed at all, either privately or at public services, yet they too received a good soaking rain, which revived crops and fodder expectations. Regular worshippers wondered, somewhat sardonically, how many people would make a special effort to worship in church the following Sunday, with thanksgiving for their relief from threatened disaster. And sure enough there were only the usual faithful present to give thanks.

"Were not ten made clean? The other nine, where are they?" The tenth, who came back to give thanks, was not only cured and made well, he was also made whole. The same applies with those who worship with thankful hearts today. The nine were certainly cured of their disease, but the tenth was made whole - much more than a mere healing of even such a loathsome disease as leprosy. For him it was the opening up of a new relationship with God, and the acceptance of His grace. It was salvation. It was healing of mind and spirit, as well as of body. And it was this complete healing of body, mind and spirit that the others missed out on.

We who come to church of a Sunday are a mixed bunch, with widely varying backgrounds and with a variety of concerns, griefs, and worries at the back of and frequently in the forefront of our minds. Although we recognise that we come principally to offer our worship to God in a decent, cohesive, worthy manner, yet surely we also come looking for peace of mind, for consolation, for spiritual strengthening for our battle of life. As we recognise that "All good gifts around us Are sent from heaven above", then we thank the Lord for all His love, as the Harvest hymn says.

Thanksgiving should play a very large part in our worship - it was through his thanksgiving that the Samaritan leper was made whole. Why shouldn't the farmer pray for rain, standing in the middle of his paddocks? Or the housewife pray for her family as she stands at the kitchen sink? Of course they can, and should. And there is plenty to be thankful for, too, as they pray. So why go to church? Because God has chosen this way, through word and sacrament shared by His people coming together, as His principal means of grace. Not the only means - we dare not limit the Holy Spirit, but His guaranteed way of salvation is through participation in public worship.

"There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

"Jesus said: I am the bread of life: he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:35 & 53) God has chosen this way for our participation in His offer of salvation - through Christ alone and through the Sacrament He ordained. Unfortunately it is just not possible for Holy Communion to be provided in every church on every Sunday, which means that we must make every effort to receive it when it is available. We make our Eucharist - the word means thanksgiving. We receive the morsel of bread and the sip of wine, for this is the way God has chosen to give us of His own life.

Why then do so many people neglect this service? Why do so many give almost any social interest or private self-concern higher priority than public worship? Why do so many make "going to church" an optional extra, instead of a vital necessity? Because for many people "going to church" is just that - merely going to church.

Do we come in faith, in confidence, in expectation, that our needs will be met? Do we come with thanksgiving, recognizing that God is with us, supporting and strengthening us, in spite of our problems? Do we come to thank Him for His love, and for the joy and the beauty and the good things we experience? Do we come believing that as we open ourselves to Him, He will come to us?

The ten lepers obeyed Jesus and went off to show themselves to the priests, as the Law required, and as they went they were healed. Here is real confidence being shown in the power and the ability of God to meet the needs of men and women. Perhaps many of those who only worship when the mood takes them or circumstances permit do not really believe in the power and ability of God to meet our needs. Very likely we actually prevent God from working His miracles because we do not approach Him with faith, with confidence, with expectation, or even with thanksgiving. If that is so, then no wonder such people see no point in faithful and frequent worship. It may be that they once faithfully prayed and worshipped, but because their prayers were not answered how they wanted them answered or when they wanted them answered, they gave up. There is a greater faith required - the faith to accept that God has an infinitely wider vision and knowledge than we have, and that undoubtedly we will pray at times for things which God in His wisdom and overall plan must deny us. That is true faith - much deeper and truer than a simplistic idea that God will always give in to our demands. No wise parent always gives in to a child's requests - our Heavenly Father is wiser than the wisest parent.

Jesus was met by ten lepers who called out, saying: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." We too must learn to call upon Christ: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us", and lay our troubles at His feet. Then in faith and confidence and expectation that all will be made well, go on our way after giving Him thanks. We have to learn to be thankful in all things - in sorrow and in joy. After all, whatever our feelings or circumstances may be, God remains- constant and His love is always surrounding us. Even "if we are faithless, He remains faithful - for He cannot deny Himself", as Paul wrote to Timothy. (2Tim.2:13)

As we offer our worship today, our prayers, our praises, and our thanksgivings, may we hear Christ saying to us: "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you whole";

AMEN

SUNDAY BETWEEN 16 & 22 OCTOBER, Year C

Responsibility: Canon Barlow

(Based mainly on the Epistle for today - 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5, with an introductory comment on the Gospel reading - Luke 18:1-14)

The message in the parable in the first part of the Gospel reading for today is about on-going, faithful, persistent prayer.. At first sight it might seem that we are encouraged to nag God until He give us what we want, like a small child grizzling around its mother's skirts until in frustration she gives in. God is not being likened to that unjust judge in the parable - He is contrasted. Jesus was saying "If an unjust and self-centred judge can be wearied into giving that persistent woman justice, how much more will God, who is a loving Father, give His children what they need?"

The judge in the story was clearly a paid magistrate appointed by either Herod or the Romans. They were notorious for their dishonestly and corruptibility. Unless you had money for a bribe you had no hope of even getting your case heard. The widow was a symbol of all who were poor and needy and defenceless. It was obvious that because she had no resources whatever she had no hope of receiving justice. But she did have persistence. She kept nagging, and no doubt presented her demand for justice on all sorts of public occasions, when her presence would be most embarrassing to him. He righted her wrong, even if only for purely selfish reasons and for the sake of peace and quiet. And Jesus said: "If a corrupt earthly judge would do this, how much more will our heavenly Father?" So persistent prayer will be answered: the problem, said Jesus, is not our unanswered prayer, but our lack of faith when and if we pray.

So much for a brief comment on the Gospel message. The Epistle however has teaching which, while not more important, is perhaps less often commented upon. That is, the importance of Holy Scripture. Paul wrote: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim.3:16,17) In writing to Timothy, Paul points to a great source of spiritual strength. Whatever the situation in which he finds himself, he will always be able to draw insight and encouragement from the Scriptures, for they were inspired by God. I doubt that he imagined that his writings would also become part of the Christian Holy Book

For the Christian, the Bible is the written record of God's communication with His people. The term "Word of God" can be misleading, for Jesus is also referred to as the Word of God, as in the introduction to St. John's Gospel: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." (John 1:14) So we must be clear in the use of the term. Over many centuries, God inspired holy and receptive men to record and make known His will. This has been part of the fundamental belief of the Church in all its branches down through the ages. The Christian Church inherited the Old Testament, the pre-Jesus part of the Bible, from its Jewish ancestors, and it treasured the writings of its earliest writers, like St. Paul, eventually culling the most significant and combining them into the New Testament.

It is often overlooked that the Church was in existence before the New Testament was completed - the early Church looked to the old writings, until the letters of the leaders of the Church began to be circulated. The Creed puts it into the correct perspective by declaring that we believe

that "on the third day Jesus rose again in accordance with the Scriptures", that is, as recorded by them. We also declare that we believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Apostolic means that the Church follows the teachings of the apostles, and we know what they are because they too are recorded in Holy Scripture.

You know of course that the Bible is comprised of 66 individual writings bound together as one volume. And those treatises and letters were written and compiled by various authors - not always those whose names the books bear. Scholars tell us for example that the Book of the Prophet Isaiah was actually written by at least three authors over a period of time. And Job was not written by Job, but is a parable about Job. The Gospels were most likely written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - but Luke's is probably written by him at Peter's dictation. The letters of St. Paul are known by the names of the Churches or people to whom they were written - Romans, Ephesians, Timothy, and so on.

Being men of various periods and civilizations, the authors wrote very much in accordance with their times, although of course they wrote with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The literal details of the writings have to be understood in the context of the particular times in which they were written. For instance the Church has just worked through the issue of the Ordination of Women, and in some parts of the Church this is still a burning problem. Paul wrote quite clearly to Timothy, 'Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I .

permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent." (1 Tim.2:11 &12) Even people who profess to accept the Bible literally and without question ignore that one! Without going into all the pros and cons of the Ordination of Women, except to say that the Church's Doctrine Commissions have pronounced that there is no theological objection to it - it is an example showing that what was right and proper for one period in the life of the Church might not be so binding on another. Both Paul and Peter spoke out against the braiding of hair and the wearing of jewellery by women! Holy Scripture is understood and interpreted by the Church today guided quite as truly by the Holy Spirit as were the men who wrote it.

How then to know how to understand and apply Holy Scripture? By thoughtful and prayerful reading, with an open mind, and by listening carefully to those trained and authorized by the Church for that responsibility. We need to have some understanding of the situation in which and for which the particular piece of Scripture was written, before we try to apply it to our own situation. We need to remember with regard to the New Testament, that Jesus spoke in Aramaic; His words were written down in Greek; they were translated into Latin by St. Jerome, and that version was used by the Western Church for many hundreds of years. Then they were translated into 17th century English, known as the King James Version. Subsequently modern scholars have examined all the surviving ancient texts, and our present day versions are as likely to be what our Lord said as could possibly be. Indeed it is something of a miracle that our Holy Book is so accurate a record after nearly 2000 years!

The Anglican attitude to Holy Scripture was set out clearly in 1958 when the Bible was a special subject of the Lambeth Conference of Bishops in that year. The Conference declared its belief that the Scriptures grew out of the life of the Church, and yet the Church is subject to them. **"The**

Conference affirms that Jesus Christ lives in His Church through the Holy Spirit according to His promise, and that the Church is therefore, both guardian and interpreter of Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless the Church may teach nothing as necessary for eternal salvation but what may be concluded and proved by the Scriptures."

There is an old saying which sums up the Anglican approach to the Scriptures: "The Church to teach and the Bible to prove." Whatever we learn from our own private reading, or when we hear some point of view about some matter being expressed, we should test it against reinforce our own thoughts and dispositions and prejudices, and this might not agree with the tried and tested doctrines of the Church, arrived at through the scholarship and experience of saints and scholars. We must read and hear with humility.

"The time is coming," wrote St. Paul to Timothy, "when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths." How true that is!

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."

AMEN

SUNDAY BETWEEN 23 & 29 OCTOBER, Year .C

Responsibility: Canon Barlow

[Based on the Gospel for today viz. Luke 18:15-30]

"Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (v.17)

The story of the blessing of the children assures us that children, even infants, whose parents bring them to God in faith, belong already to God's family and therefore to God's kingdom. God does not wait for them to have faith in Him. For God is God the Father, and we grossly misunderstand the nature of His kingdom if we do not see it in the light of a father at the head of his family - an ideal father of course, equally supportive and encouraging to each of his children regardless of age or disposition or intelligence. This is why Sunday Schools and segments for children during worship are important - not merely in the hope of attracting parents if the children want to come to Sunday School, or so that children will grow up to be faithful members of the congregation. That of course, but more importantly for the child itself, that he or she might come to find that they are children of our Heavenly Father who will accept and treat them just the same as any who may have reached so-called "years of discretion."

Jesus does not ask His disciples to be childish, but to be childlike in that aspect of childhood of openness, receptivity, the ability to accept what is-given without embarrassment, to delight in receiving gifts. Without this quality, says Jesus, nobody whether adult or child, can enter the kingdom.

By contrast with the children, that certain ruler, or member of the ruling class, thought he could earn his way into the kingdom of heaven. He supposed that entry into the kingdom was by some kind of examination: he had passed Elementary Religion to his own satisfaction, and as he believed, to the satisfaction of the Examiner: "I have kept all the Commandments from my youth; what more must I do?" Now he wanted to go for Advanced Religion. We must not think that Jesus replied to his request and prescribed the syllabus which would enable him to graduate with distinction into life eternal. "O.K., you've passed Obedience to the Commandments; now sell your belongings and give to the poor." In telling him to get rid of his fortune, Jesus was trying to bring him to the point where he could put his trust in God, and not in his own wealth and possessions and achievements. In this connection, the opening question of Jesus "Why do you call me good?" - is of great importance. Jesus is not being bashful or mock-modest, nor casting doubt on His own sanctity. He is pointing out to the enquirer the true nature of the blessing he sought. Eternal life is not a graduation certificate. It is life in the company of God, and that means in the company of the Eternal Goodness. What the ruler should have asked was: "How can I become fit to dwell in the presence of utter goodness?" But he went away sorrowful, not having even glimpsed the question, let alone the answer.

The answer is given in Jesus' conversation with His disciples. The entry of any man or woman into eternal life or into the kingdom is a miracle of God's grace, which cannot be earned but only accepted with humility and faith - "as a little child."

The peril of possessions is that they stand in the way of this receptive faith. The rich person trusts in his riches, and this tends to be true, not only of material wealth, but of intellectual, moral, and spiritual wealth also. The ruler could not bear to part with his possessions, but he would also have found it difficult to lay aside his education, his righteousness, his piety, and to throw himself simply

upon God's compassion. As would we all. Even Peter does not really understand. You can hear his self-righteousness: "We've left our homes and followed you." He thinks that he and his fellow disciples deserve better than the rich ruler because they have made the sacrifice at which he balked. Whimsically Jesus promises that those who have left home, and family for the service of the kingdom will find themselves caring for a far bigger family than the one they've left, before ever they reach eternal life in the age to come.

It is sometimes assumed that Jesus was on the side of the poor, because He always seems to be putting down the rich. Holy Scripture says nothing of the kind. In response to the wealthy ruler's inability to rise to His challenge, Jesus said: "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" Not a condemnation of wealth, just understanding of the power of the temptations which wealth can provide. Poverty also provides its temptations to avoid worship and service. There are those who feel they cannot afford to go to church, because a collection plate will be put in front of them, and there will be fund-raising events they would be expected to be involved in. People should be able to contribute to the support and maintenance of the Church and the extension of its work, out of love of God and the desire to provide for a worthy place of worship and a ministry made available. And they should be able to do so comfortably and without embarrassment, and according to their means.

In our Lord's day it was considered that wealth was a sign of God's favour on a man. Furthermore, a rich man could obey the Commandments because he could buy the services of others, so that he could remain ceremonially clean. He would not have to steal. He could afford to care for his parents. Of course temptations of a rich man may be to commit adultery and to lie, as we know, but he doesn't have to. He certainly would not work on the Sabbath Day because his slaves and servants would do that for him. He might not even have to covet if he was rich enough, although possession of things leads to the desire to obtain more, and more, and more.

The same dangers of temptation exist for us today, for as a people we are far better off than the majority in Jesus' day. And we have plenty of possessions to tempt us away from our service of and obedience to God. A car, a caravan, a boat, a 34-channel T.V. set, even sporting ability and prowess may tempt a person to use them rather than to attend worship. But then, to go to church just because you can't afford to do anything else is to go for the wrong reason!

No, the danger is that we have so many possessions that we may be lulled into a sense of false security, and that we will overlook that which we really need: trust in God and complete dependence on Him.

"Thou shalt not enjoy life" was never Christ's teaching. But "Beware of material possessions" was, and it is still relevant. We are all rich to some degree, for we all have possessions which we value, and there are always more things which we would like to have. The hanging-on to what we have and the striving after other things are real temptations and pressures to lure us away from Christ's service.

Material possessions are just that –things of this world. And we will leave them behind when we leave this world. How then will we fare if we have concentrated on the things of this world ∴ neglected to seek the riches of life in Christ?

Amen

Today, October 28th, is the day set aside for the commemoration of two of the least known of our Lord's disciples, Simon and Jude. Neither gets much of a write-up in the bible record. They are both mentioned in St. Luke's list of the apostles called by Jesus, well down the list in the 10th and 11th places, just ahead of Judas Iscariot. (6:15) They were amongst those present who witnessed our Lord's Ascension, (Acts 1:13), and presumably with the group on the Day of Pentecost, receiving the Holy Spirit with them. Nothing is positively known about them from then on. There is a 'tradition that Simon and Jude worked together in Syria and travelled as far as Persia, or modern Iran, where they were martyred.

There is a very short Epistle attributed to Jude in the New Testament It consists of only 25 verses, and is the second to last book in the New Testament, placed between the Epistles of John and the Book of Revelation. It concludes with a very fine doxology: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages now and for evermore. Amen, (vv.24 & 25). It is often used as a blessing at the conclusion of a funeral service.

Although the Epistle of Jude was written to warn against false doctrine, it generally has a gentle tone. "Be merciful to those who doubt." (v.22) and "To others show mercy, mixed with fear." (v.23). And of course' the doxology which I have just quoted. So Jude is sometimes known as the peaceful one.

An interesting contrast with his linked compatriot., Simon, nicknamed "The Zealot", wrote no Epistle. He was a member of the Zealot movement - radical, nationalistic, anti-Roman, revolutionary. I think their descendants are still operative in the Middle East today, though with a different enemy.

But together, Jude the peaceful one and Simon the Zealot, show us the diversity that was possible in the first twelve called by Jesus. I wonder if he did it deliberately! It should remind us that we here in this congregation and in the Diocese and in the wider Church can and must work amicably in our Lord's service, despite any stresses and strains in our relationships with each other. Just consider the stresses and strains of the last dreadful days in Jerusalem, and the crucifixion! Yet the Apostolic band, with all their individual differences, held together.

From the earliest days Christianity has exalted holy and pious men and women as saints. And there is a huge number of them, most of whom we have never heard. They have tended to be men and women who lived many hundreds of years ago, and time has in many cases added all sorts of legends to their names. Many of them we would consider a bit odd: some rashly insisted on defying the authorities; some had visions and hallucinations; some spent a lifetime of contemplation, living apart from society. And so we have come to think of saints as those portrayed in stained glass, with a painfully pious expression and folded hands without much joy and gaiety about them. Unreal and remote.

I would remind you, because I'm sure you've heard it said before, of the other, Biblical, use of the word "saint". And that is the way St. Paul used it on a number of occasions in his Letters. Several times he begins an Epistle by addressing his readers as saints, yet surely they were a mixed bunch like us - a bit "patchy" in our devotion and in the expression of our faith. In his Epistle to the Romans he begins: "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints". The Second Epistle to the Corinthians begins: "To the Church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia". The Epistle to the Ephesians begins: "To the

saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Jesus Christ". And similarly to the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi. I have laboured the point rather, to show how, to Paul, the term saints meant those who were members and followers of Christ.

We may never have thought of ourselves as saints, and that is just as well because we might have let that idea overwhelm our awareness of that which tends to separate us from God. It is better for us to see ourselves as "called to be saints", rather than saints already because of the confusion of terms.

For we are called to be saints. Just because the Anglican Church stopped canonizing men and women as saints does not mean that there has not been any since the Middle Ages. It is rather a recognition that we are all called to be saints by virtue of our very membership of Christ's Church, given to us at our Baptism. St. Peter says we are a holy nation - not meaning Australia of course, but the Church of God. Not because we have already gained holiness by the conduct of our lives, but because we are holy in that we have dwelling within us the Holy Spirit; that we are members of the Body of Christ on earth, the Church; and that we partake of the Holy Food in Holy Communion. God is continually giving us the opportunity to be holy, as his sons and daughters. Holiness is for us, and is meant for us.

In four day's time the Church will celebrate All Saints Day, November 1st. On this day we commemorate not just a single saint, but all those godly men and women who have passed to their reward in heaven, and we are reminded of our link with them as fellow members of the Church of God. We remember especially our belief in the Communion of Saints - the whole number of God's servants. We know the names and deeds of many saints, but there have been many, many others, just as holy and heroic, whose names we do not know. They are known to God though. On this day we pray that we may so follow the blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to those inexpressible joys God has prepared for those who truly love him.

The following day, November 2nd, is All Souls Day, dating from the 10th Century;. It stems from the desire which asks God that all the faithful departed, and perhaps those not so faithful, may share in the victory of Christ over the power of death. In times of war, plague, and famine this day has provided a focus of hope for many.

This homily has strayed from the particular - the Saints Simon and Jude - to the general, all the Saints. But there was not a great deal to say about Simon and Jude anyway, and since we recognise them as saints we need to know what we mean by that term. So I sum up by going back to the collect for today, where we have prayed that, like the apostles and prophets who were the foundation of the Church, we too may be enabled to reveal God's love and mercy, joined in unity of spirit. For this is the whole point of our membership of Christ's Church on earth, as we are called to be "a holy temple, acceptable to God."

AMEN