

Gratitude

The homily given by Rev Dr Michael Paterson
at our eucharist for All Saints' and All Souls' on 31 October 2021
The readings were Isaiah 25.6–9 and Matthew 5.1–12

*'The Church is a field hospital for sinners;
not a prestigious museum for saints.'*

Not my words, but the words of Pope Francis.

*'The Church is a field hospital for sinners;
not a prestigious museum for saints.'*

I find those words really reassuring, because each time All Saints comes round and we hear the Beatitudes I feel a bit daunted:

- 'Blessed are the pure in heart' – well that rules me out immediately.
- Blessed are the merciful' – well, as long as she says sorry first.
- 'Blessed are the peacemakers' – but he started it!

I want to be holy, but I am not sure I want to be that kind of holy.

And yet, over the last 20 months of Covid I have come to see that holiness is not about belonging to God's spiritual elite – those supermen and superwomen of faith who lead heroic lives and die heroic deaths.

What I have come to understand is that the difference between a sinner and a saint is the presence or absence of **gratitude**.

Sinners look at themselves. They look **inwards**. And, not liking what they see, they grumble, they complain, they moan. 'Poor me' they say.

Whereas Saints look beyond themselves. They look **outwards**, they appreciate things, they focus on the good, they are thankful. 'Look at that', they say.

Looking only at themselves, sinners drag themselves and everyone around them **downwards**.

Whereas looking out from themselves, Saints draw themselves and others **upwards**.

Grumpiness breeds grumpiness. A downward spiral.

Thankfulness breeds thankfulness. An upward pilgrimage.

When it comes to getting holy, practicing gratitude may be the most transformative thing you and I could ever do.

Ask any alcoholic or addict following the 12 step programme and you will hear that it's the daily practice of gratitude (Step 10 in AA) that keeps them sober.

Ask any of the Saints that you have known in your family or friends and they will tell you that there's always something to be grateful for.

I want to get holy and I guess you do too.

So how's about we make a decision to start right here, right now, not by signing up to some spiritual bootcamp for the religious elite, but by making it our daily habit to practice gratitude, to focus on the good, to count our blessings, and to say thank you each day, no matter what life throws at us.

And then this hospital for sinners which is St Margaret's will become St Margaret's holiday home for retired saints.