

## The Feast of All Saints (C)

### Ephesians 1:11-23 & Luke 6:20-31

Today we gather to celebrate all of God's saints – those recognised in the church calendar, and those whose names are known only to a few. This feast is a special time set apart to honour our sisters and brothers in Christ who, in their own way, made Christ visible. It's a celebration of our shared identity – that with them, we are part of Christ's body, God's family – a communion that stretches across the globe and transcends time, uniting the church on earth with the church in heaven.

When we think of saints, we probably focus on the the well-known ones – like our patron saint, John; Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of Jesus; and the apostles. As we journey through the centuries we meet such figures as Augustine of Hippo, the great teacher and bishop of 4<sup>th</sup> century North Africa; Claire of Assisi, who joined up with Francis in a radical life of simplicity and renewal; and more recently, Suzanne Aubert, the Roman Catholic Nun who was a compassionate reformer based in 19<sup>th</sup> century Wellington, and Te Whiti o Rongomai, whom we honour as a prophet and peacemaker.

These are, what we might call, the 'official saints' – those who have a day set aside for them in the church's calendar – and some even get to be pictured in stained-glass windows – as there are in this Cathedral. But sainthood isn't reserved for the few. There's a story of a priest showing a mother and her son around a church filled with stained-glass windows. After hearing the stories of the saints depicted, the boy said, "I get it. Saints are people the sun shines through." That's exactly it. Saints are people through whom, however imperfectly, the light of Christ shines.

So, I wonder – do you see yourself as such a person?

You may never be commemorated in a stained-glass window, but you're a saint. In Ephesians, the author says, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints." In the early church, 'saints' referred to all believers. The New Testament uses the term 64 times – not to describe heroic Christians, but ordinary ones. People like us. People called to reflect Christ's light and love.

The word 'saint' comes from *sanctus*, meaning *holy*. Saints are holy ones, ordinary people who have the Holy Spirit within them and are seeking to follow Jesus – who are allowing the Spirit of Jesus to transform them, to make them more like him. So, what does holiness actually look like?

Ephesians tells us that we're Christ's body in the world – his hands, feet, and voice. We are called to be Jesus to others. Luke's Gospel gives us a picture of what that may look like. Here Jesus declares blessed, those who are poor, hungry, grieving, and persecuted. I find this rather disconcerting because the ones Jesus names as blessed are those who seem to have a rough time of it. And those who seem to have it all – wealth, comfort, status – receive woes – they're promised sorrow and trouble.

God's kingdom turns the world upside down. In God's economy, love, mercy, forgiveness, and service are the true riches. That's what holiness looks like.

And then Jesus gets practical. A paraphrase puts it like this:

Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, gift-wrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously. (*The Message*)

That's a job description for saints. It's also the life our baptism calls us to. It sets us apart – not above others, but different in the way we love. The Greek word for holy also means 'set apart.' Our lives are a journey into sainthood – into discovering what it means to be holy, to be Christ to others.

That journey is unique for each of us. It's inspiring to read about Mother Teresa of Calcutta, but we're not called to be her. We're called to be ourselves – transformed by grace, shining with Christ's light in our own way. The saints before us encourage us, not to copy them, but to become the person God created us to be.

Today we remember our calling to be saints. Though the path to holiness can be challenging, even tough, we're not alone. Those who have gone before us encourage us. We give thanks to God for the saints in our lives – those through whom the light of Christ has shone. They may now be dead to this world, but they're alive in Christ, and continue to surround us with their prayerful fellowship and love as members of the Communion of Saints, the family of God.

Let's take a moment to recall with thanksgiving the saints who have journeyed with us and shared Christ's light. As we do so, remember you're sitting among saints now.

On this feast of All Saints, may we receive the grace to shine with Christ's light – to be saints here and now.

Eternal God,  
you have always taken women and men  
of every nation, age and colour  
and made them saints;  
like them, transformed,  
like them, baptised in Jesus' name,  
take us to share your glory;  
where you reign one God for ever. Amen.

*Alister Hendery*  
*Preached at Waiapu Cathedral – 2.11.2025*