

All Saints Day November 3, 2019

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Today we are celebrating All Saints Day, and although we could focus on the well-known Saints like Saint Peter or our own St Andrew, I would like to think about all those other men, women, and children who have gone before us and on whom we stand in our faith. We especially remember those that have been influential in shaping our lives and guiding us along the particular paths that we have taken.

The world we live in is a complex and complicated place. In just one day we may interact with or do a multitude of things that influence other people's lives, just as they interact and do things that affect us. Sometimes these are obvious things, like when we speak to people at work, at church, or at the shops, or when we are at home with our families, or speaking on the phone. However, sometimes our actions or what we say can affect others and we don't even realise it. Things like when we are driving or walking our dogs or perhaps, with the warmer weather arriving, watering plants in the garden. We can very easily be unaware of others around us as we are focusing on something else.

Mitch Albom has written many books, and the stories in them reflect the interactions of people with one another and give us insights into our own lives. In one of his books called "The Five People you meet in Heaven", Albom describes the arrival in heaven of Eddie, an elderly amusement park maintenance worker and his subsequent interactions with five people that have played an unexpected, but major part in the way his life panned out. Eddie had been unhappy with his life on earth and felt that he hadn't accomplished anything worthwhile; but, during his introduction to heaven he meets up with people from various parts of his life that explain how they were affected by him and his actions. Each of the five people leaves Eddie with a crucial lesson. Two of these lessons are

- There are no random acts in this world, as everyone's lives are interconnected in some way. This struck a chord with me when I discovered that a person that I share an office with taught my cousin's brother's children, which is amazing because my cousin lives in England!

The other relevant lesson is

- Everyone is in some particular place, doing some particular thing, for a reason, and even if we can't understand it at the time, we are all a part of a bigger picture and are an integral piece of God's plan.

When these, and some other things are made known to Eddie, he feels much more content and at peace with his life, satisfied that he had led a meaningful life after all. The book then concludes with him settling happily into heaven for eternity.

The lessons that Eddie learns in the story are equally relevant for us today. We have been placed in specific circumstances by God and we have a purpose that we are fulfilling. It might not be obvious to us at the time; but, like Eddie, when we look back, we are able to find some meaning in what we did or what was happening to us. Keeping this in mind, we should strive to live our day to day lives in the best ways possible, being mindful that what we do will affect other people.

Today's Gospel reading has some good advice in this area.

In the latter part of the reading and further on in Luke Chapter 6 Jesus says "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."¹

This sounds like rather a formidable list of requirements of human behaviour and none of us, as flawed human beings, could possibly meet all of them over our entire lifetime, Jesus is the only person who could do that! We are very fortunate that God is full of grace and forgives us when we fall short of being the ideal person; however, this doesn't mean that we can give up trying. Paul's letters to the churches in Thessalonica and Colossae contain similar advice and encouragement to his readers. In his first letter to the Thessalonians he says "brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from

¹ Luke 6: 27-31, 36

us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more.”²

He also says to the Colossians “lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.”³ Paul is pointing out to his readers, which includes us, that it is important to try to live good lives not only for the sake of those around us but also to please God and he uses the visual picture of our actions being the fruit that we bear. This metaphor is used repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments, possibly because fruit trees have been around since the beginning of time and everyone is familiar with them. The fruits are what are viewed by others in what we do and say, as only God can see inside us and know our inner thoughts, and these actions are a reflection of what we are made of. Jesus says, “The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”⁴ The message to us is clear, we must constantly try to do what is right and this will be pleasing to God.

But why would we want to bother to do this? It might be easier not to do the right thing sometimes! We do this because we are thankful to God for all He has done and will do for us. He sent Jesus who died on the cross, so that our sins can be forgiven, and He promises us an inheritance of eternal life in heaven.

In “The Five People you meet in Heaven”, Mitch Albom paints a picture of heaven as a good place to be, where we can meet up with other people, and make sense of our lives. His story is fiction, and no one really knows what heaven is like. The Bible tells us that it the place that God is to be found, where Jesus sits at His right hand and that all the saints, well-known and not well-known, from all ages, are with them. We believe that one day we will join them, and it will be wonderful.

However, before we do that, we must try to live a good life in accordance with God’s plans for us, being mindful of how our actions and words affect the lives of those around us each day.

² 1 Thessalonians 4:1

³ Colossians 1:10

⁴ Luke 6:45

Let us pray

Almighty God

Thank you for all those people that have been influential in our lives and now reside with you in heaven.

Help us to always be mindful of how our actions affect other people and be with us as we try to be bearers of good fruit to fulfil your plans for us.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour,

Amen