

Beloved, we are God's children now.

On All Saints Sunday we celebrate all God's beloved children. We celebrate the saints you see in the stained glass windows – our family picture album of the great and glorious and frankly somewhat weird characters who are heroes of our faith. This year we remember those we see in the other family album of the AIDS quilts - mainly young men, mainly gay, who allowed us to share in their hard journey of suffering, allowed us to embrace them as brothers and sisters. And every year we give thanks for all the unsung saints of our own lives who have brought God's love a little closer to us.

For this isn't primarily a day for the Shakespeares and Einsteins or even the Kardashians of the kingdom of God. It's a day for the everyday Janes and Joes whose names are not remembered by the church but who are equally precious in the sight of God. This is not a day when we celebrate the shining accomplishments of the few but the blessed loveliness of the many.

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Let me tell you of one of my own saints, my oldest brother – Geoffrey. His life was desperately short - he was just three years old when he died from the multiple disabilities that had been with him since birth. I was only born a few weeks before Geoffrey died so I never got to know him. But I lived in the gift of his legacy. In one way Geoffrey could not be said to have achieved anything in his short life – he was never even able to walk or speak or feed himself. But in another way he achieved so much. His birth began my mum and dad's journey as parents, while his total dependence gave them and his other carers an opportunity to offer unconditional love. He opened the hearts of those around him by his need and vulnerability and so made the world a more loving, God-filled place.

There is no life which is too restricted, too little, to be a beacon of God's love. To be a saint in someone's life. This is one of the ways that our faith is so stunningly counter-cultural. We don't place premium value on doing and accomplishment, we place it on being and on loving. These 13 young lives who are being welcomed into the cathedral family today are all equally beloved by God. They will continue to be equally beloved and equally valued whatever they achieve or fail to achieve in their lives. There is no competition here – no way to gain more of God's love or to lose even a drop of it - we are God's beloved children now.

And this takes us some of the way but not quite all the way into the story of All Saints Day. For it's impossible to think about All Saints without thinking about death as well as life. All these people remembered around us in the windows and the quilts are dead. They haven't 'passed' – after all no one gets to fail the test of death – they died. And death is scary, let's not pretend otherwise. That's why we all dress up in silly costumes and go out in the dark on hallowe'en – to scare away the monsters and bogeymen that hide in the dark of death. Getting some life-giving sweetness along the way from the candy given by the kindness of strangers.

Death is scary partly because it brings with it the heartbreaking pain of loss for those left behind. And it is also deeply scary because we don't know what happens to us next. But our readings today give us some hints if we are willing to accept them. There is the reassurance of Revelation's promise that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Then there is the letter of John admitting we don't know exactly what we will become, but also saying: "What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him". We will be like Christ, like God. We will be like our heavenly parent.

We – us everyday and extraordinary Janes and Joes - will be like the one who loves all of us intimately, individually and equally. We will be like the one who defeated death. We will be like the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness and who longs for all her children to be peacemakers. We will be part of a whole ginormous shining crowd of people who are like God. Part of the crowd with the Blessed Virgin Mary, with Francis, with Gary and Andrew named on the quilts, with my brother Geoffrey, with your own beloved dead.

Beloved we are God's children now. This is the identity we celebrate and claim for our own in baptism. This is the identity we live into together as a community of faith, a family of spiritual seekers. This is the identity we share with the whole communion of saints, living and dead. And this is the identity that awaits us all on the far side of death as we are transformed to an even closer resemblance to our heavenly mother.

Beloved we are God's children now. How will you live into that identity? What legacy will your life leave for God's children who are being baptized today and those yet unborn? How will you have touched the world with God's gentleness? Where will you have sown seeds that bear fruit in the future? What will you have given time, talents and treasure to in order to build a hope-filled world?

My closing prayer is very short and comes through words by Michael Leunig:

“Let us live in such a way
That when we die
Our love will survive
And continue to grow. Amen.”