

From The Vicar....

Dear Friends,

November 1st brings around All Saints Day once again. It is a day special to us at All Saints Church, for it is our dedication festival – so there will be special celebrations.

All Saints Day, is above all, a day for Christians to reflect on the lives of Christian heroes through out the centuries, some of them known to history, others unknown. On All Saints Day, we shall thank God for them, and I shall be casting my eye on to some of the glorious windows in our Church, where many of those great saints are depicted. Those saints give an example of faith, often faith tested to the end, to the very act of martyrdom.

Saints are not just in the past (and not just in St Helens!). At his retirement service in the cathedral in October, the Bishop of Warrington spoke most movingly about the steadfast faith under persecution of Christians in Zimbabwe under the tyrant Robert Mugabe. Denied access to their churches by his thugs, many congregations have had to worship outdoors. Denied access to their cathedral by a ‘Bishop’ who is a Mugabe stooge, and denied access by the same stooge to diocesan funds, the Anglican Church there has had to function without funds, and in the face of intimidation and beatings and imprisonment. Bishop David spoke about the Confirmation service he shared in 2008 with the real Bishop in sports stadium in Harare (it should have been the Cathedral). And the thousands who were there.

So there are Saints bearing a faithful witness in Zimbabwe today, a Christianity with fire in its belly and the vision of God that is very present to them. Amidst all that persecution, Bishop David told us, the Church thrives! And I was so glad to hear about it, for it is where I did some of my growing up.

And how do we, as saints-in-the-making, measure up to that? In our society many look upon worshipping God as just one lifestyle option among others, something to do if the time suits, or if our other activities suit, and if we feel like it on the day. Hardly the stuff of the martyrs of old, who gave their lives for the faith of Christ, hardly the stuff of the Christians of Zimbabwe today, who give us such a great example of putting our faith at the centre of our lives, at whatever cost, even death itself.

I pray that in our soft and complacent society, God will grant us the energy and commitment to follow the example of his saints, both past and present.

My love and prayers,

Stephen