

## **Celebrating All Saints. November 5, 2017. Inspired.**

People who inspire me.

Brother Roger Schutz, founder of the Taizé Community in France. He showed enormous love and courage and faith in God and in the people who gathered around him. He didn't let small things like not having enough resources stop an open-hearted welcome. 'There isn't enough room in the church? Break down a wall and let people be included. There are barriers between people. Pray with them, love them, sit and listen and forge friendship which will open ways of life in a desert of barren fears. His presence simply spoke love and peace. When he was murdered by a deranged woman 10 years ago his last words were simply "Peace, peace." The community he founded still gathers and inspires and listens to thousands of people throughout the world every week.

Queen Alice. You may not know her. She inspires me. She has a heart which has been through terrible times and yet she is serene and inspires love. Her courage in the face of the things she has been through in her short life so far make her, and her family (especially her mum) inspirational.

Alan Turing inspires me. He is rightly called the 'father' of modern computers. He persevered when many around him thought he was crazy or deluded. He persevered despite huge danger to himself because of enormous prejudice against him. He was true to himself and his desire to do what he could to help others, to use what was in him to help other people. In the end the persecution of Alan because of his homosexuality led to his early death, but every time you use a computer give thanks for this gay man and his courage and determination.

A friend who inspires me has a life filled with enormous pain and yet gets up each day, cares deeply about others, lives simply and gives whatever she can to people in need. She knows who she is. Because of the terrible things that have happened in her life even believing in God is a struggle. I can understand that. Life really sucks sometimes. Yet she lives love. She chooses to keep caring. To me she is incredibly inspiring.

Another friend, who died recently, lived her life for others too. Her work and other circumstances meant that a large amount of money came her way. She used it to care for others, to set up a house for women escaping from the streets and from domestic violence. She donated to medical research and programs to assist people suffering from terrible diseases. Will she be remembered? By those who love her she will. Did she live a life which reflected the love for others which God calls us to immerse ourselves in? Absolutely. Will she be added to the list of saints officially proclaimed? That is doubtful. But she is on my list.

I could list many people. My list also includes lots who are on our list of official 'saints'. Francis and his desire for peace and deep connection to the world around us. Maximilian Kolbe who stepped in and offered himself and was killed in the place of a man with a family who then survived the concentration camp where they were both held. Peter who was a fisherman then thrust into a position in the church where he bumbled and stumbled and made so many mistakes and yet kept coming back to speak and stand up to share what he believed. Mary Magdalene who was so inspired by Jesus that she stepped into serving, even when that led to her own place in relation to Jesus being questioned and slandered. When you are doing the right thing you don't listen to the slanderers and petty critics.

I could list more and more. Who inspires you? From across the ages and the recent past and even now? Who helps you to find new perspective, new ways of looking at yourself and at life. Who radiates something which touches your heart?? We are inspired by people around us and inspired often by the people closest to us, family and friends. In this service today we are remembering many of them with love.

When the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote about being encouraged and inspired by the 'great cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1) I don't think that was only describing the people who are very easily and simply recognised as 'religious' and pious saints. I think we find inspiration in many ways to be true to the call of God on our lives, to live in love, to show love.

The 'great cloud of witnesses' encourage us to make better choices. That IS a choice. To see, to listen, to be aware of what is happening and has happened in the lives of others and to let that change how we live our lives. Making positive choices to live with deeper awareness of our impact on the lives of those around us, making positive choices about how we use the blessings and resources placed in our hands, making positive choices about how we treat others, ... these are godly choices, inspired choices.

We are here, being encouraged to be aware, to do the right thing, the best thing, the HEART thing which is a sign of love. Not just the expedient and easy thing. Choosing easy paths is a process of looking inwards and not outwards, to do only the thing which satisfies ourselves. We are here recognising a call to have a better, wider, deeper sense of what it means to be a person here in this world, a partner, parent, sibling, child, friend, neighbour, companion.

At the heart of the gospel, at the heart of the invitation we celebrate in baptism, as we will this morning, is not a call to be narrowly religious. It is a call to love as we are loved, to be inspired BY love, as we see it in those around us and as we see that love in God.

Amen

**Paul Mitchell**