

A cloud of witnesses

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 1 November, 2020

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Karyn Burchell-Thomas

Pentecost 22A

Contemporary Reading: *Blessing the Way from Circles of Grace*
by Jan Richardson; Matthew 5:1-12

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

In more modern times, well, since the 4th century, the term 'saint' has taken on a meaning to reflect a particular person with special gifts and a special relationship with God that brought about miraculous events in the lives of those around them.

Looking closer at their lives will show that they were very human beings indeed - with faults and characteristics and idiosyncrasies that would not always make them easy to be around. Quite often they were excommunicated for their challenging ways, only later to be raised up as an inspiring influence in not only their local community but beyond, and over time, as one held in reverence.

Of course originally, the term 'saint' had more humble, very human origins. It simply meant the holy ones or put more simply, the faithful; the faithful gathering to worship God. The faithful gathering to promote and follow in the Way of Christ.

None were identified as having any super powers. Many stumbled, had backgrounds of which they might not be proud, they disagreed, fought, got angry, made mistakes, questioned and doubted, had jealousies and were afraid. Because they were ordinary people. We read about them in ancient Hebrew texts, in the Gospels, in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles.

But what they all had, all saints have, in common is that beyond all that hinders and trips and messes things up for them, beyond all else, is the yearning to find life in God. The belief in a dream for things to be better, for life and for the world to be a better, safer place for all. For community to be an inclusive, loving, forgiving, affirming, respectful, gracious, generous and compassionate place.

One that promotes rather than destroys life. A community based on God's love, on grace, compassion and forgiveness. Where it is valued, gifted. A member blessed telling the story and keeping it true - and perhaps no more beautifully or better relayed than through learning from experience and even one's own mistakes, being strengthened in one's weaknesses and loving in the face of all that would try to destroy love.

What follows is a play brought to you from within the community of saints at Pitt Street Uniting Church. It was written and directed by Katy Gerner a member of Pitt Street Uniting Church and each of the characters are portrayed from among its members.

The play tells the story of some individuals throughout the ages who, as they went about their ordinary lives, found themselves to be doing rather extraordinary things in extraordinary situations – because they helped others find life, healing, freedom, acceptance, community, love.

Most may not be remembered, yet in the telling of their stories we just might recognise the many saints who are around us right now, going about their daily lives and activities, doing quite ordinary things, yet in the process being extraordinary. Without even realising, they help others find life, healing, freedom and acceptance, community and love.

Here are their stories:

The play can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zG1s2YiDsiA> , starting at 16 minutes 15 seconds.

Everyday Saints! They are gathered around you.

Some are well known, like Martin Luther, Mother Teresa, CS Lewis, Helen Keller, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Junior, Oscar Romero, Oskar Schindler, Tere Gonzalez, Anoka Primrose Abeyrathne, David Naibei, Chebet Lesan, Joseph Sarvary, Marek Kubik, Eduardo Sanchez Gonzalez and Greta Thunberg. All the students and young people striving to be heard for action on climate change and of course many, many more.

And many are ordinary folk whose names go unnoticed, but not their actions: the teacher from kindergarten guiding our fingers under the words; the nurse in the hospital keeping watch over a patient needing a ventilator to breathe, at the mercy of a viral pandemic; the parent feeding their child and singing them a lullaby.

Saints every one, living ordinary lives with passion and compassion, as do you, saints each one.

Together saints dream and work and pray for the world in need, in need of care across the borders, as nations struggle to defeat a pandemic,

struggle to feed their people,

struggle to find a vaccine,

struggle to keep their people safe,

struggle to keep the peace in the streets,

struggle to house everyone,

struggle to care for the land,

struggle to hold back global warming,

struggle to make the right decisions,

struggle to discern the way,

struggle to give up old, harmful ways,

struggle to find a way ahead,

struggle to love,

struggle to forgive,

struggle to share,

struggle to compensate,

struggle to support.

Struggle, just struggle.

In silence we hold the world's strugglers before you, lover and Creator of all Life.

Loving Creator and sustainer of all life, inspire the saints in the struggle to find life and freedom and wellbeing for all.

Inspire all saints to love.

Amen.