

Luke 6: 17-26 (The Beatitudes)

Today, All Saints Sunday, we remember those who we love, and who have died. We would love to be with them, to express our care for them. Do you have a memory of when you deeply regret that you did not care enough for another person?

If one feels that one did not care enough for someone else, then the perimeter of such reflection goes further than personal matters. The Beatitudes say, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." The care we should express goes further than personal issues, and into the whole community of humankind. At the end of a century of tremendous technological advances, the world has never had a higher percentage of hungry people than we do now.

Surely, we cannot be happy about ourselves, or proud of ourselves, when our global community has great differences in quality of life. Those differences in quality of life may be reflected in vastly differing levels of education, housing, food, health services; and then, consequently, of domestic or civil violence.

Gladstone said that selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race (Speech at Hawarden, May 28th, 1890). William Temple (1880-1944) said, "There is no structural organization of society which can bring about the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, since all systems can be perverted by the selfishness of man" (The Malvern Manifesto). Therefore, although just political structures are obviously extremely important, we must also at the same time nurture individual values of sharing. To share generously is a central value of being a member of the people of God and of the reign of God.

The way of sharing: St Cuthbert, along with all the saints of the people of God, reminds us of our essentially human calling to be one with, or (in the words of our Collect today) "knit together" with all the people of God, and especially the poor. Such personal contacts with the poor are formative for life, and this is something we should try to foster amongst our young people. This is a central element of what we refer to by Christian baptism: that through death to ourselves, we discover real life.

Jean Vanier was a Canadian who founded the L'Arche worldwide network of communities for mentally disabled people. He remarked that Jesus did not say: 'Blessed are those who care for the poor', but 'Blessed are the poor', which reflects St Luke's view of the key to the kingdom. In some mysterious way, the grace of God actually is present amongst those who suffer: when I visit someone who is in prison, who is in hospital, or who is hungry, then I actually touch and feel the grace of God which is present with them. "The Lord... adorns the poor with victory" (Ps 149:4). It is not burnout, but it is God's blessing which comes to me from those I serve. This is Christ's example, which Paul quotes in Phil 2:7-8: "Assuming the nature of a slave...he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross."

When we care for others, Luke says the Spirit 'leaps' in us. Material pleasures eventually fade, on the one hand. But, on the other hand, caring service to those who suffer or are marginal – including for example the poor, children, and the elderly – near and far, gives a great and lasting joy that comes in the morning (Ps 50:5). Today, All Saints Day, as we remember with love those who cared for us, and who have died; so in the broader community: people who have cared for others provide us with the best chapters of Christian and human history. They are the people in their generations who deserve our praise (Eccl 44:1f). Our prime example is Jesus, whose joy finally came only after he humbled himself to achieve his purpose, in his death and resurrection. "Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names" (Phil 2:9). After a life of service in Christ's name, having "come out of the great tribulation" (Rev 7:2-4, 9-17), we too can expect that the full measure of our joy will come in the resurrection. "Their posterity will continue forever".

"I did not care enough." Have we matured beyond these selfish toddler attitudes? Spiritually mature people are generous – they "give and do not count the cost" (Ignatius Loyola), and they care for those who suffer. In sharing generously, we are not poorer, but we are even more blessed than the one who receives.

Rev Canon Dr John Stubbs
Interim Pastor, St Mary's Episcopal Church

347 Davis Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10310-1557
Parish office: (718) 442-1527
Parish fax: (718) 442-4555
Fr Stubbs -- mobile/ cell: (347) 844-2402
Email: rector@stmarysi.com
Website: www.stmarysi.com