

All Saints', 2015 Hinde Street Methodist Church

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last Sunday we made two new saints at St Marylebone, it was not done with the pomp and splendour of a pope making saints in St Peter's Square, but here in the waters of the font two young children were baptised, and in the waters of baptism they began their exciting journey to sainthood.

In the waters of the font, and in the faith of the church, we baptise men and women, old and young, not only into the inheritance of the saints but so that each man or woman who is baptised, can be counted among their number as a saint.

St. Paul tells us that we are all called to be 'saints', and on this Feast of All Saints, we rejoice with those whose lives have been transparent examples of just what that means, not only to others in their own time, but to succeeding generations.

Saints are not a small caste of chosen souls but an innumerable crowd to which the Church urges us to raise our eyes; a multitude, not only of officially recognized Saints, but the baptized of every epoch and nation who have sought to live their lives faithfully and lovingly.

Rich or poor, male or female, young or old, there are two things that all the saints share in common.

The first is their transparent love for Jesus, and the second, is that their lives have shone – and still shine, down through the ages - with Christ's light, reflected in and through their living and, all too often, their dying.

Whenever a new Christian is brought to the waters of baptism, the Church prays that they will grow to love Jesus, that they will come to know Jesus as a friend as well as their saviour and, that their lives will shine with Christ's inextinguishable light.

In the very dark and troubled days of the First World War, Rufus Jones, one of the most influential Quaker thinkers and writers of the 20th century, wrote that the saints were those, whose lives have shone out with Christ's reflected light in such a way, that the light with which they shine "reaches deep into other men's

darkness, revealing their condition to them, making them aware of evil, checking them in the pursuit of it, giving a vision of righteousness, attracting towards goodness, pointing infallibly toward the Christ from whom the Light shines.”

“Giving a vision of righteousness, attracting towards goodness, pointing infallibly towards Christ” – that sounds like a pretty good job description of what being a saint is all about, doesn’t it?

Indeed, it sounds like a pretty good job-description for anyone who has been baptised and is, therefore, called to be a saint.

I don’t know if it is current Methodist custom, but at the end of the baptism service in the Church of England, the person who has been newly baptised is given a candle lit from the great Easter Candle which burns alongside the font.

This giving of a candle is no empty but pretty, gesture; it is a powerful symbol and affirmation that we, as baptised men and women, accept that calling to be saints; to be those who, in our generation, seek, with God’s help, “to give a vision of righteousness”, “to

attract towards goodness”, “to point infallibly towards the Christ”.

Sadly, as we know only too well, the world has never been short of dark places, but, thanks be to God, God has also made sure that the world has never been short of women and men who have taken their calling to be saints seriously either; the baptized of every epoch and nation who have sought to live their lives faithfully and lovingly.

To begin to take seriously our calling to be saints, at Hinde Street, in the parish church, in the ruins of a church in Aleppo or Mosul, we have to take our baptism seriously and we have to engage in doing those things which we have promised to do at our baptism.

Daily, hourly, minute by minute, we have to reject the devil and all rebellion against God; we have to renounce the deceit and corruption of evil; we have to repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour.

Together with the saints in every generation, we in the power of God’s Holy Spirit in our generation have to

incarnate the Gospel in our lives, wheresoever and howsoever God invites us to live them.

The great saint Teresa of Avila knew that this 'making the Gospel incarnate' was among the chief tasks of every baptised person, for

Christ has no body now, but ours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but ours.
Ours are the eyes through which he looks
With compassion on this world.

On this Feast of All Saints', may the example of all the saints who have gone before us and made the Gospel incarnate through their living and dying, rouse within us a renewed desire to 'burn with Christ's unquenchable light'; to 'rail against darkness in its many guises'; to 'proclaim, with utter conviction, that the Light of Christ has not only come into the world and has conquered the world, but that it still burns brightly'.

Amen.