The Little Saints Who Made Us Who We Are

All Saints' Day – Matthew 5:1–12 and 1 John 3:1–5

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *saint*? Perhaps we think of St Francis of Assisi, St Teresa of Calcutta, or remarkable Christians whose names have been remembered for centuries.

But today, I want us to think not primarily about the great saints in our church calendar, but about the **little saints who never became famous, whose names may never appear in history books, but whose lives helped make us who we are today.**

Think of a grandparent who taught you to pray, a teacher who encouraged you, a friend who stood beside you in difficult times, or a church member whose kindness helped you experience God's love. They may never have been called saints, but their lives taught us about faith, courage and love.

I want to offer three reflections today: saints as teachers who educate us through their lives, saints as threads in God's great knitting together of humanity, and the calling to become a community through which others experience God's love.

1. Saints are teachers who educate us through their lives

Our reading from 1 John says:

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"

Our holiness begins not with our achievements but with God's love. We are God's children, continually being shaped by grace.

Our greatest teachers are not always those who stand in classrooms. A grandmother who teaches a child to pray, a parent who sacrifices for the family, a neighbour who cares for someone who is ill, or a friend who offers forgiveness can teach us more through their lives than through many words.

Rowan Williams, in his All Saints' Day sermon in 2009, reflected that saints make God credible through the way they live. Their lives offer evidence that the love of Christ is real and can be experienced in the world. Their holiness is not simply a personal achievement; it becomes fruitful when others receive their witness and carry it forward.

The little saints in our lives become our teachers, and we become their living lessons when we pass on what they taught us.

Consider Rosa Parks, whose refusal to surrender her seat on a segregated bus in 1955 became a defining moment in the American civil rights movement. Yet she did not act alone. Claudette Colvin, a teenager, had also refused to give up her seat months earlier. Many others challenged racial injustice long before their names became widely known.

Their stories remind us that transformation is rarely the achievement of one celebrated individual. It grows through the courage and faithfulness of many people, some remembered and others overlooked.

Jesus offers a different understanding of greatness in the Beatitudes: *"Blessed are the meek," "Blessed are the merciful,"* and *"Blessed are the peacemakers."* He measures blessedness not by popularity, power or wealth, but by lives shaped by mercy, justice and peace.

So let us ask ourselves: **Who taught you to become the person you are? And whose life might God be shaping through you?**

2. Saints are threads in God's great knitting together

My second image is knitting. Each thread has its own colour and character. One thread alone may seem insignificant, but woven together with countless others, it becomes part of something beautiful and strong.

Our lives are like those threads. We are shaped by parents, teachers, friends, neighbours and church communities. Even those who have died continue to shape us through their words, values, prayers and examples.

This is one way to understand the **communion of saints**: we belong to God's people across generations, united in Christ beyond the boundaries of time and death.

Rowan Williams makes a remarkable point: the saints do not possess holiness as a private achievement. Their lives become fully fruitful when we respond to their witness and allow Christ's life to become visible in us. Our lives are bound up with theirs, just as theirs are bound up with ours.

When we gather around the Lord's Table, we remember that the Church is more than the congregation we can see. We are united in Christ with those who have gone before us and those who will follow. The Eucharist reminds us that faith is received, shared and handed on.

This knitting together is not always easy. Families disagree, churches struggle with differences, and communities experience division. Yet God's grace continues to weave lives together.

Walter Brueggemann, in *The Prophetic Imagination* (1978), challenges God's people to imagine and embody a community shaped by justice, compassion and hope rather than domination and exclusion.

The communion of saints is therefore not simply something we celebrate in the past. It is something we are called to live in the present.

3. We become little saints through a witnessing community – Diamonds in us

What does this mean for us at St Mary's?

Think about our table tennis group, walking group, mother and toddler group, Thursday Club and the many other activities that bring people together. These may appear to be ordinary social activities, but they can become much more than that.

They become Christian when the way we welcome people, build relationships and care for one another reveals something of God's love.

People may come to play table tennis, enjoy a walk, bring their children, or share friendship over a cup of tea. They may not come looking for God. They may not even think of themselves as religious. But through our patience, kindness, hospitality and willingness to include them, they may begin to experience something of God's welcome.

They encounter the Christian faith not only through what we say, but through what they experience when they are with us.

And think of the little saints whose service often goes unnoticed. Shaun, Mike and Roger look after our churchyards. A few people come during the week to clean the church. Our flower arrangers beautify the building; our listening group offers a ministry of presence; our safeguarding team helps protect the vulnerable. PCC members, churchwardens and welcomers give their time and energy to sustain our common life.

Many of these people have served faithfully for years. They may never stand at the front of the church or receive public recognition. Yet their work makes a difference to the lives of others and helps create the conditions in which people can encounter God. Volunteering to community and to the church is a way to say yes to God's calling. Passing that spirit of volunteerism to the next generation is the way of keeping the gaps in the society.

This is the ordinariness of holiness that Rowan Williams invites us to recognise. The saints make God credible through their lives. Their witness is not simply about speaking convincingly about God, but about living in ways that make the love of Christ tangible.

Our challenge, then, is to ensure that our activities do not simply bring people into the same room, but help us become a community in which people experience belonging.

Can someone who comes to our walking group find friendship as well as exercise? Can a parent attending the mother and toddler group find a listening ear and support? Can someone who joins the Thursday Club discover that they are valued, even when life becomes difficult? Can a newcomer enter our church and find people who genuinely want to know them?

We do not need to force conversations about faith. We need to practise a faith that makes room for people, respects their stories and allows relationships to grow. In time, people may ask what motivates our care, and we can share the hope we have in Christ.

Our mission is not simply to invite people into church; it is to become a church through which people experience God's love.

Walter Brueggemann's vision of an alternative community challenges us to live differently from a world often shaped by competition, isolation and exclusion. Our church activities can offer a small but powerful alternative: a place where people are welcomed rather than judged, relationships matter more than status, and no one needs to earn their dignity. Seeing ourselves interrelated, interconnected and interdepdendent is to see Christ in everyone of us. This is what we affirm every week at the communion table.

Dear friends, one day future generations may look back on us. As Rowan Williams challenges us to consider, what will they say about the witness we leave behind? Will they remember a church that maintained its buildings and organised activities, or a community that helped make God's love believable through the way it lived?

Let us give thanks for the little saints who shaped us. Let us recognise the little saints serving among us. And let us ask God to help us become little saints for those who will come after us.

May our activities become places of genuine welcome, our service become an expression of Christ's love, and our church become a beautiful fabric woven from many lives, gifts and stories.

For we are God's children, and what we shall become has not yet been fully revealed.

May the little saints who shaped us inspire us to become little saints for others. And may the love of Christ knit us together into a communion of saints through whom the world may experience the love of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.