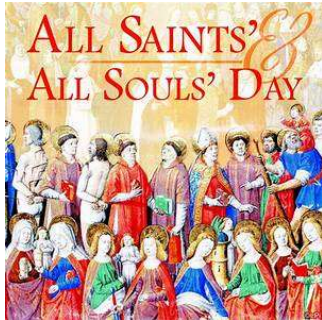


SERMON – ALL SAINTS/ALL SOULS – 30 OCTOBER 2022

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



In my Baptist days we never did much with saints, so it wasn't really until I got to Theological College that they made much impression on me. Worshipping every day, there was a rhythm of people we commemorated, a rhythm which again underpinned my Cathedral life, which I try to let underpin my life today – though I am not finding it easy and I need to be more disciplined about a daily prayer life. I reminded myself last week that I don't just need to lead a zoom service on a Sunday morning, I can actually join in with broadcast worship every day of the week – I can watch evensong from Derby Cathedral, Bury St Edmundsbury cathedral – indeed I can pretend I am sitting in my stall in the midst of it, just like I used to be. I suppose that part of the frustration is that I'm not – I don't like being ill!

It is worth reminding ourselves that for our forebears the rhythm of the year, the rhythm of the saints, was their daily rhythm. The people of Allestree would have marked the saints in their church, the people of Darley would have watched as the monks in their abbey marked the days of the saints – worship as the very basis of life.

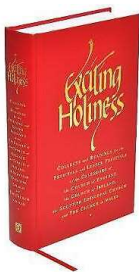


Jacob Rees Mogg got a lot of contempt last week when he wrote his resignation letter and dated it “The Feast of St Crispin”. It was pointed out that St Crispin (and his brother Crispinian) are the patron saint of cobblers, which seems very appropriate for Mr Rees Mogg – my contempt is because he will no doubt take the payment that MPs claim when they leave the cabinet, even though his wealth – most of it apparently safely overseas so he has to pay no British tax on it – his wealth is more than any of us can dream of.

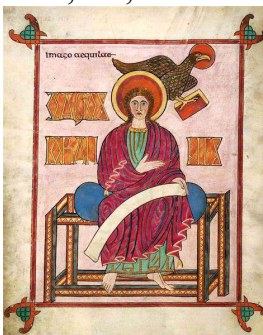


St Crispin's day is also, the Shakespearean scholars among you will remember, the day the Battle of Agincourt was fought –

*And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers*

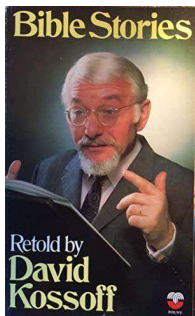


Some of you will know that when I come and do Home Communion, I tend to use this book – “Exciting Holiness” – readings for saints' days. How often, over the years, had a particular saint sparked a conversation, sparked some memories – it's been lovely listening to people's reminiscences. With my own blog – northernvicar.co.uk – a blog which has been sadly neglected of late – you look up a saint, and it will take you to a church dedicated to them, and you'll remember the place you visited, the photos you took, the people you chatted with, etc, etc.



To me, so much of faith is about people – and we can learn from people of the bible. When we look at Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul – their stories are amazing, their journeys are amazing. Those bits at the end of various of Paul's letters when he writes that Mark and Luke are there with him – just imagine being part of it. What did they learn, what did they discuss, how did they live in the faith of Jesus Christ – what did that actually mean. The faith that they had was strong enough that some of them, many of them, faced death because of it.

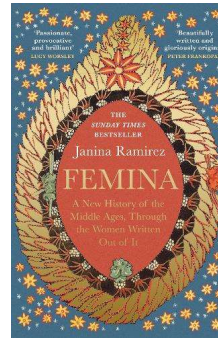
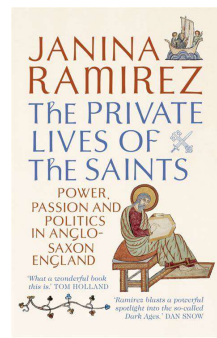
And then we've got all those other people in the bible who really are just one or two stories. You know I have a soft spot for doubting Thomas, having been ordained on his feast day, and being a person who often has doubts. Not much about him in the bible, but stories that he took the gospel to India, that his life was amazing. A few lines in the New Testament, and we have the whole story of the worldwide church – a church we pay very little attention to. They can teach us so much.



Then there are those who are just names, or sometimes not even that. You'll know my love for the David Kossoff stories, where he takes people who must have been there and imagines their story. Those human stories always bring the biblical stories to life.



Then we have all the saints from the history of the church across the world. We'll celebrate Edmund in three weeks time – because the story of a Saxon king still resonates centuries later. I love the Northumberland saints – men, and I am aware that they are nearly all men – who were people of faith, who preached and taught and walked miles, and counselled kings, and served the poor – and lived their faith in the world. And you go into the little church at Eglington, or the abbey at Lindisfarne, or stand by a cross or the pool at Holystone – and you feel so close to the people of the past.



And a huge shout out (as we used to say) to people like Janina Ramirez who make sure that women's voices are not lost in all of this. Half the world's population, and the church is still dreadful at listening to them.



You know I think there are huge opportunities as we link faith and heritage – and many churches do amazing work bringing people in to enjoy the history and the heritage, and talking about the faith that lies behind it. I have to say that when the Belper Museum has shut a couple of weeks ago, and the National Brewery Centre in Burton on Trent closes today, one does wonder if our society values heritage at all – in my depressed moments they seem to value heritage when it doesn't cost them anything, and when they don't have to be involved. We were in Wirksworth church on Friday, a stunning church – with a PCC of half a dozen members, and a Vicar who is also involved in the other nine parishes of the Wirksworth Team. We are certainly very short of people willing to keep our churches open, in good repair, and proclaiming a faith in the living God.

The nice thing about All Saints and All Souls is the way we have that link. We don't just remember the great figures of the church, but it also comes down personally – people special to us. Parents, partners, children, friends, fellow worshippers. Some of them were verging on sainthood – most of them weren't – but they are ours', we love them, we remember them, we commend them to God.

You don't need me to tell you that grief hurts, that memories can hurt – every All Souls' I remember my boys, Gareth and Theo – every year I struggle to say

their names, and hold it together as we continue through the list. And this year I struggle because it won't be me saying their names – life is flipping horrid at times.



Ho hum, this is all part of the circle of life. And it is a circle of life in which we are held by God. Part of my life's circle has been the Cathedral in Coventry – you know I married a Coventry girl. I remember, forty years ago, exploring the new Cathedral together – and you know the amazing glass screen that separates the old and new Cathedral. A screen of saints and angels – it has been described as a celestial cream cake. I like that image – we are all part of the cream cake of God's creation – those who have gone before, those who we share our life with, those who will come after. To God be the praise and glory. Amen.