



**St Alban's Patronal Festival**  
**Sunday 25 June 2017**  
**Stuart Mossman**  
***2 Maccabees 6:18, 21-31***  
***1 Peter 2:19-24***  
***Matthew 10:16-22***

Today we observe **St Alban's Day**

Alban is the earliest British Christian known to us by name and martyred for the faith. He was beheaded in June 304 or at an earlier date of 209 during the persecution ordered by the then current Roman Emperor. A Christian priest, fleeing for safety, came to the house of a pagan named Alban in Verulamium (present-day St Albans). Alban gave him shelter over several weeks, and was so struck by the beauty of the religion, the fugitive professed, that he himself was converted to the Christian faith.

When the officers of the Roman army came to Alban's house searching for the priest, Alban exchanged garments with the priest and sent him away to safety, allowing himself to be arrested instead. When the governor of Verulamium heard what had happened and discovered that Alban also had become a Christian and that he refused to renounce his faith, he ordered him to be flogged and tortured. When he realised that Alban had no intention of renouncing his new faith, the governor sentenced him to be executed.

In the OT reading today *2 Maccabees 6: 18, 21-31* we hear of Eleazar's martyrdom. Eleazar was a Jewish Scribe who refused to do something that he regarded as against his faith and decided to leave a memory not only to young men, but also to the whole nation, the memory of his death being an example of virtue and fortitude.

We might ask the following questions:

- What is the value or importance of the history of the OT, the church and of the saints?
- Is it of any importance that persons of each successive generation since have known of these happenings, thought about them and followed and celebrated them?
- Is there any message in the consistency of such faithful generations?
- In acknowledging their faith have successive generations consistently got it wrong or alternatively have they consistently got it right?

What impact should the faith and perseverance of earlier Christians have on us?

We might draw the following conclusions:

- We can be encouraged not only by the example of faith but the *consistency* of it being endorsed by presumably querulous and at times one presumes doubting generations who still came to the same conclusion of the reality of their faith.
- *We don't have to work* out the basics of faith all on our own
- *We can be confident in the examples set down by others* of the reality of their faith and the living God
- *We can discard our doubts*
- *We can be encouraged our lives are aligned in the right direction*
- *We can rejoice*

I would like to discuss the saints in general and the history of the church under 3 topics

History, Heritage and altruism

## **History**

Faith and history go together. We cannot separate church history from what we believe. The Orthodox understanding of Christian truth is grounded in the Incarnation, the Son of God taking on human nature. Because the Son of God entered into human history our faith is grounded in the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth, who asserted: I am the Truth. When Orthodoxy claims that the Christian Faith is the true faith, it is asserting that it is a real faith, based on historical events that actually happened. Because Christianity is grounded in reality, our salvation in Christ is a real salvation.

We can be encouraged in this historical fact and by the subsequent history of events since Christ's resurrection. It is that men and women have been sufficiently impressed by this fact that they leave us a history of their reaction to it.

I am encouraged by the history of mankind and the history of the saints that men and women continue over the ages to want to follow the principles of Jesus. If so many people have done this for so long then there is an encouragement and reassurance that if we do the same we will be in good company.

*For those who are doubting in their faith* or those who feel their faith poses more questions than answers what does the history of the saints mean to us?

The saints offer us the confidence with consistent evidence of a way of living *and* ongoing evidence that we can trust in faith with the example of the generations that have gone before us. We don't need to seek a new or right way of living ourselves.

*For those of us who are firm in our faith* we can be sustained and encouraged by the faithful witness of the saints through history and by the generations that have continued to hold their values paramount.

## **Heritage**

Heritage is somewhat different from history and relates to how much we take on personally the facts of history into our personal beliefs and how we let it affect us.

We have the historical facts of the saints, but we, also as part of the body of Christ have been left with a personal claim on that history.

Thus as Christians we can value the witness of a way of living that has been handed down from the past, as something that *belongs* to us by sharing the faith the saints had and practising their values and qualities. As Christians we also have a spiritual heritage when we came to Christ, trusting in Him as our Lord and Savior, and we became members of God's Forever Family.

In taking up our heritage we take on the example of the saints.

The word "saint" comes from the Greek word *hagios*, which means "consecrated to God, holy, sacred, pious." The idea of the word "saints" is a group of people set apart for the Lord and His kingdom

We can extend that to say that, scripturally speaking, the "saints" are the body of Christ, Christians, the church. All Christians are considered saints in the eye of God and at the same time are called to be saints. First Corinthians 1:2 states it clearly: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy..." The words "sanctified" and "holy" come from the same Greek root as the word that is commonly translated "saints."

Christians are saints by virtue of their connection with Jesus Christ. Christians are called to be saints, to increasingly allow their daily life to more closely match their position in Christ.

So God calls all members of His Church to be holy—literally, to be saints.

Many of the letters of the apostle Paul (see Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians) begin with a greeting that includes the word "saints" such as, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia." In such statements, Paul includes all believers in Christ.

Saints are characterized by faithfulness to their Lord (Ephesians 1.1; Colossians 1.2); ...endurance in their faith (Revelation 13.10; 14.12). having been revealed the mystery of the Gospel of Christ (Colossians 1:26). ..being called to confirmatin of their lives to God's holy character; i.e., to live a life that is consistent with their status as saints (Ephesians 5.3). ministering to one another's needs (Romans 12.13; 2 Corinthians 8.4 and 9.1; Ephesians

1.15, 4.12 and 6.18; Colossians 1.4; 1 Timothy 5.10). AND as a result of which the saints will receive a glorious inheritance at Christ's return (Ephesians 1.18; Colossians 1.12; 1 Thessalonians 3.13; 2 Thessalonians 1.10).

*In taking up the heritage of the saints we are taking up the values and practice of their values*

## **Altruism**

Altruism is a selfless concern for the well-being of others.

The saints could be regarded as showing altruism.

There are a number of different psychological and social explanations for the phenomenon of altruism.

It would appear that altruism is an inherent part of all world religions and is not confined to christianity. All world religions concur that altruism that is an unrewarded action for the sake of another person is virtuous. All world religions encourage sacrifice of one's interest for those of another-a stranger or an outsider.

So how does the altruism of the Christian saints differ from the altruism of man in general.

Non Christian religions teach various forms of self salvation whereas in the gospel the whole emphasis is on the gracious invitation from God toward sinners to relieve them of their predicament (sin) by honouring Him.

The chief difference between Christianity and other world religions and the chief stumbling block is on the cross. Christianity, rather than – putting hope in self salvation, speaks of the the love of God in providing his way of salvation.

Buddhism sees the human predicament in suffering rather than sin with deliverance coming through absolution of desire by self effort.

Hinduism teaches the doctrine of retribution through reincarnation.

Judaism continues to teach the possibility of forgiveness which the old Testament promised but denies that Jesus is the Messiah and that forgiveness of sins through his death is the only ground on which God can forgive.

Thus, although altruism may be part of human nature, and the best part of human nature, Christian altruism is motivated by our reaction to the saving grace of God through the sacrifice of Jesus and our wish to be an example for him.

Thus christian altruism is not motivated from human desire but is motivated from being filled with the joy of God and an outpouring of the holy spirit.

Thus, as Christians we can attribute the effect of altruism to God with God working in us. Thus, true empathy and altruism come through God and are not primarily of own motivation. Thus we thank God for the altruism of the saints as they have sacrificed self and allowed themselves to be filled with an outpouring of the gifts of the holy spirit.

Human nature is such that when man cooperates with God, altruism can rise to high levels. The overriding motive for true committed Christians is the love of God and all mankind that reaches from the depths of our hearts with the same love that God loves us. The Holy Evangelist Luke reports the condition of this love: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, *expecting nothing in return*" (Luke 6:35, emphasis added).

Perhaps an example and an acknowledgement of Christian altruism might be appreciated in comments said to be made by Mahatma Gandhiji when some Christians visited him and in response to a question replied and I paraphrase "if you Christians really loved one another as you have been told to do you would change the world"

Luke tells us in the "Parable of the Good Samaritan," as told by Jesus. The Samaritan, (an outcast and scorned by the Jews), helped a man beaten by robbers and left for dead. Before the Samaritan arrived the almost dead man was overlooked by both a Levite and priest. Following this Jesus asked: "'Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man...?' He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise'.

The Good Samaritan shows us the spiritual way of "Divine Altruism." Altruism can only be "Divine" if it "fulfills the law of Christ," with nothing expected in return.

The altruism of the saints was not just directed for the good of others but an altruism presumably reflecting the love of God in the 1st and 2nd commandments. Thus the history of the saints and the church are a

consistent witness to Man and woman's greatest attainment in life ie serving others as such service reflects the love of God .

## **Summary**

We can take encouragement in the example of the saints for the following reasons:

- The factual history of the saints lives acknowledged and practised through repeated generations suggests that these generations have got something right
- Accepting this is our personal heritage is a reaction to the significance of that history.
- Accepting ourselves as sinners and acknowledging that we need the love of Christ to redeem us enables us to be filled with the holy spirit. This should result in acts of altruism.

**The question for you and me** - is if this history is real and important, and we accept this as our heritage, what small act of altruism is God calling you and me to do?