

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR ALL SAINTS 2025

The picture in the first reading is of the Saints being those who have survived persecution. For many years here in England that has seemed more like ancient news than relevant to today. But if we take a look at the news from Aid to the Church in Need, we realise how this is something that is happening today. There are persecuted saints surviving, or indeed not surviving but already in heaven, all over our world.

After the arrival of Daesh/Isis in Iraq Christians and others were killed or forced from their homes. After bringing a home to well over a million Christians only 250,000 still survive there today. Aid to the Church in Need was there as soon as it was possible to help rebuild churches as was Pope Francis. Syria the same. Once a home to 1,500,000 Christians now about 500,000. Those there today are living in extreme danger. Most recently the calls for prayers and help have come from Sudan and Burkina Faso where Christians live under threat for their lives, and many have died. Some of us here today will have experienced this in some form.

When we speak of 'saints,' this can mean so many things. To St. Paul all those called were saints. To some Christian sects over history, it has been the select few, excluding all others. To many of us it is the famous saints that we know, ancient and the more modern like Carlo Acutis. They have become great examples for us in how to follow Christ. This is the key to today's gospel. If I ask myself, "How can I be a saint?" then one of the first places for me to start is to sit down with that gospel, we call the Beatitudes, and ask how my life measures up, and how can I live following those words that Jesus spoke to the crowd right at the beginning of his mission, ending with the words "Blessed are those when others persecute you for my sake."

So, where we might look too is at the lives of those being persecuted today across the world. What amazes me about them is that they have the courage to stick to their faith. If you listen to their stories they find their courage in the words of Jesus Christ and their shared faith.

Would I have that same courage? Is my faith so deep that I could rely on its strength when faced with real challenge?

Many years ago when I was just beginning at seminary I was only starting to understand what the universality of the Church meant, the fact that it covered the whole world, when I watched a young woman in Rwanda reading the very gospel I had read that Sunday, but in her case with only one arm because of what she had just suffered in the civil war.

In many ways, in this country we are not persecuted, certainly not as we once were, but charities like Aid to the Church in Need, open our eyes to the lives of our brothers and sisters who share the same Church and faith as us and yet at great cost to themselves and their families.

Today I would like us to pray for our fellow saints (as St. Paul would say) who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb, who have suffered for Jesus Christ, and who trust that we will pray for them in their need.