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Trinity 22 and All Saints Day: Sainly works in progress

Sermon delivered by Bishop Gregor Duncan on Sunday 1 November, 2015.

*+Gregor was visiting All Saints to review
the congregation's first year of Mission Action.*

Old Testament
[Isaiah 25](#): 6-9

New Testament
[Revelation 21](#): 1-6a

Gospel
[John 11](#): 32-44

Revelation 21.3: See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them

After today's service and our MAP review I'll be having lunch with Graeme and Jane Hely and I know that I will feel entirely at home with them, welcomed, comfortable, relaxed and enjoying their kindness and their hospitality.

I don't say this to flatter them, or anything like that, and certainly not to embarrass them, but rather to raise the question of what it might mean to "be at home" in any given situation. I think we all know when we don't feel like that with people, when we feel somehow out of place, uncomfortable, on edge, not quite knowing what to say or to do to make things a bit better.

Well, that's what it's like for us, but, if I dare ask such a thing, what might it be like for God? In the passage we heard from the Revelation of St John the Divine the reference is to a future state of when *the home of God is among mortals and he will dwell with them*. And, of course, all sorts of wonderful things flow from God's being at home with us, welcomed, enjoying us, delighting in us, knowing He's in the right place, in the best of company.

Now, the word that's translated "dwell" in these words from Revelation is the same word in Greek that we find, very famously, at the beginning of St John's Gospel: the *Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. In other words, this is not just about God being at home with us at some stage in the future, it has already happened. In the Word made flesh God has already made his home among us. Wonderful for us, but not quite so wonderful for God: do you recall the surrounding verses from St John: *He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him*. In other words, being at home with us was a bumpy ride, to put it mildly but I hope not irreverently.

On the other hand, St John's Gospel also says, right after the words I've just quoted: *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.* So, he did find himself at home in some instances and much goodness and blessing flowed from that divine experience of being at home.

Which, at last, brings me to All Saints' Day and to the present time, and to essay a working definition of a saint for this day and for this time. Saints are those people with whom God finds himself at home within the confines of this fleshly existence, people who have offered God their hospitality and, as a consequence, become sources of blessing and goodness and many other desperately needed things in the world. People also who point to how God wants the world to be, utterly transformed in a future blessedness we can only imagine, with the help of scriptures like that one from Revelation with which we began, so unlike the world as we find it.

Saints approached like this can be the great figures of our faith, beginning with the blessed virgin and the apostles, but they can also be, indeed they should undoubtedly be, you and me, people we all know, saintly works in progress if you like, ordinary people to celebrate whom the church in its glorious wisdom sets aside this day, and not least among that countless throng, the members of All Saints' Jordanhill. We don't need to await future glory to become saints, it can be happening now - Lazarus, brought back to this earthly life to live it again and to die again, must surely have realized that this was only possible for him because Jesus had made his home with him and his family and so shown him the potential of this life for blessing and good as well as of the life of the world to come. This life can be pregnant with the wonder that is to come - and to being pregnant in that way we are called.

You've done a lot with your Mission Action Plan and you've almost done me out of a job by reviewing it in some detail already - I'm very grateful for all of that and for all that it represents. And I would encourage you, as we go through the review together today, to set it all in this context of being saints in the making, people with whom God is already at home, people who can spread God's blessing and goodness in the world.

Amen.