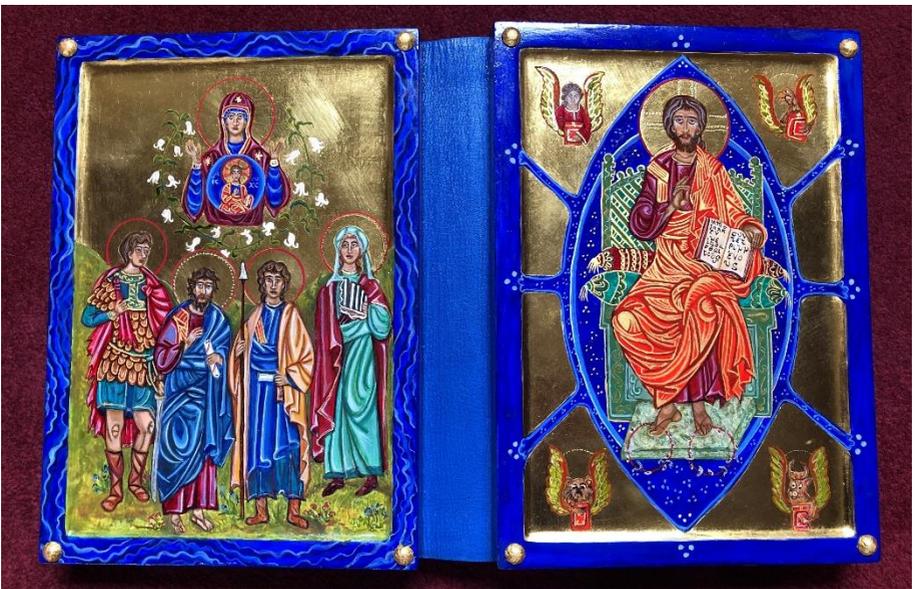




St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## All Saints 2020

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



Saint Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that we are *all* ‘called to be saints’<sup>1</sup>, yet in spite of this, we tend to think of saints as those who peer at us from icons or stained-glass windows or stand impassively carved into niches.

But behind every icon, ever plaster cast or painted window saint, is a real living, breathing, walking, talking person: a person of flesh and blood with a story to tell, and not just any old story, but a story which has allowed those who have had the privilege of being connected in some way with the person's story to see, not just something of the inner life of that women or man, but something of Jesus and his Kingdom.

Shortly before his crucifixion, some Greeks who had travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover festival sought out Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."<sup>ii</sup> This is what saints do – the help us to see not themselves but Jesus!

Today, the Church sets before us not just an individual saint, but *all* the saints, all of those women and men who have, in every time and place, through their living and often through their dying helped other people to see Jesus. Women and men who have told a story or lived a life that has been more about Jesus than it has been about themselves.

Sometimes that story might have been almost unbelievably heroic or courageous, sometimes it would have been a quiet, unobtrusive story lived out in the shadows of history; a story which, in the person's lifetime at least seemed to have accounted for little, but which, when others have looked back on it and reflected upon it, has revealed a profound truth about what it means to be a true friend of Jesus.

Dom Gregory Dix, an Anglican monk at Nashdom wrote this about the saints, and it is a passage always worth sharing:

To those who know a little of Christian history probably the most moving of all the reflections it brings is not the thought of the great events and the well-remembered saints, but of those innumerable millions of entirely obscure faithful men and women, every one with his or her own individual hopes and fears and joys and sorrows and loves — and sins and temptations and prayers — once every whit as vivid and alive as mine are now.

They have left not the slightest trace in this world, not even a name, but have passed to God utterly forgotten. Yet, each one of them once believed and prayed as I believe and pray, and found it hard, and grew slack, and sinned and repented and fell again.

Each of them worshipped at the Eucharist, and found their thoughts wandering and tried again, and felt heavy and unresponsive and yet knew — just as really and pathetically as I do these things.

There is a little ill-spelled, ill-carved rustic epitaph of the fourth century from Asia Minor: — *‘Here sleeps the blessed Chione, who has found Jerusalem for she prayed much’*.

Not another word is known of Chione, some peasant woman who lived in that vanished world of Christian Anatolia. But how lovely if all that should survive after sixteen centuries was

that one had prayed much, so that the neighbours who saw all one's life were sure one must have found Jerusalem!<sup>iii</sup>

Saints are not made from plaster or stone or paint or glass, but from flesh and blood, sweat and tears, laughter and joy, elation and disappointment, through the faithful reception of the sacraments, by partaking in the fellowship of believers, through saying their prayers, the reading of the scriptures and reflecting upon the apostles' teaching.<sup>iv</sup>

So, what does a saint in the making look like?

Just turn and look at the person sitting next you; look at yourself in the mirror when you get home, for we are all called to be saints.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.2

<sup>ii</sup> John 12.20

<sup>iii</sup> Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (1945).

<sup>iv</sup> cf. Acts 2.42 '[they] continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers'