



St Mark's Church, Reigate

November 2018

Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton

Dear Friends

November begins with the twin festivals of All Saints (1st November) and All Souls (2nd November). Though many saints have their individual festival days, All Saints is an opportunity to remember and give thanks for all the saints and martyrs, known and unknown. It is a day that encourages us to be conscious of our heritage, the vast number of ordinary men and women who, through the centuries have given their time, energy, skills and, often, their lives, to pass on the gospel message, and to ensure that future generations would hear it, understand it and discover its truth. It is thanks to them that we are now able to call ourselves Christians.

Included in that number are the people whose influence and example encouraged us to explore what it means to be a Christian, and to set out on the journey of faith for ourselves. They may be (or have been) very ordinary people, but God worked in and through them to touch us and speak to us of his reality. For me, a major person was Barbara, whose late husband had been Vicar of St George's Brandon Hill in Bristol where I became organist aged just 14. She, along with others, kept the church open, alive and vibrant after the death of her husband as no new vicar was to be appointed as the diocese wished to close the church. But what touched me was her warmth, her cheerfulness and the way she was always willing to stop and talk to me, and made me feel that I mattered. She also looked after the dozen or so boys from school who attended the 8am Holy Communion there before our school service at 9.30. In between she fed us with a hearty breakfast that she prepared, even though she was in her 80s.

She once spoke to us boys about saints, and she pointed to the stained-glass windows around the church with pictures of the saints in them, and said that saints are people whom the light shines through. I've always loved that description. I believe that we are all called to be saints, people whom the light shines through. We are called to let Christ's light shine in our lives, to be willing to pass on the message of love and grace that we have been entrusted with in whatever way we can, in word and action, in simple and ordinary acts of love.

Barbara died many years ago, and has now, I believe, joined that "great cloud of witnesses" spoken of in Hebrews 12, those people of faith who have set the example for us. And that brings us, in a sense, to All Souls. It originated as a time to pray for the souls of people in purgatory – a rather dubious Catholic doctrine – but in more recent years, in Catholic and Anglican churches, it has been regenerated as an opportunity to remember those who have died, giving thanks for them and the way in which their lives have touched and blessed ours. Here, as in other churches, we hold a special service, particularly for those recently bereaved, in which those who have died are remembered by name – this year on Sunday 4th November at 6pm.

As we embark on a month during which we are very conscious of encroaching darkness and cold, it is good to take time to remember the warmth and love and light that so many special people have brought to our lives. It is good to take time to be thankful and these dates offer us that opportunity. I invite you to call to mind those people who have inspired you and thank God for the gift of them in your life. If the "saints" that you are conscious of in your life are still alive, you may, if you haven't already, like to take the time to thank them, to let them know what a difference they have made. Otherwise, you may consider doing something to express your appreciation of them – a card, email or flowers to a family member; a gift to an appropriate charity. I only suggest this because sometimes, it can be a real help to do something practical.

With my best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.