

“Nothing is so strong as gentleness, and nothing so gentle as real strength”

These words are attributed to St. Francis de Salas. Who is my saint for today. I heard a story many years ago about a child when asked in Sunday school to describe what a Saint is? Looked at the Stain glass window of the church and replied “someone the light shines through”, which I think is a pretty good description, don’t you?

Until a few weeks ago I knew nothing about St. Francis de Salas. But I was intrigued by his statement. He was born in 1567 & died in 1622. He was made a Saint in the Catholic Church in 1665. He came from a wealthy family but eventually became convinced that he was beyond redemption and was destined for hell & damnation. It made him quite ill and he even took to his bed. But then one day as he was praying in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary known as the “Black Madonna”, he had a revelation that it was possible through the love of God how we live our lives and the sharing of that love with those around us would ultimately lead to heaven.

He gave up his secular life and became a priest. He rose through the church and eventually became Bishop of Geneva. This was at the time of the protestant reformation, huge religious divisions were in the land it was a time of great unrest. He survived attempts to assassinate him, but became noted for his deep faith & gentle approach, and in fact is attributed with winning people back to the Catholic Church through his love and gentleness. . He is known also for his writings on the topic of spiritual direction and spiritual formation, particularly the” Introduction to the Devout Life” and the “Treatise on the Love of God”.

I have recently been reading a book about the crusades and how, which seems so alien to me, men went out to fight and kill in the name of Christ and to seek revenge on the Muslims who had taken over Jerusalem, many of the knights were promised, through their efforts to earn release from sin. It seems so at odds with what our Saint believed that you gained heaven through the unconditional love of Christ and the sharing of that love and gentleness.

Talking about the devout life, Jen and I have lately been watching, on you-tube something very relevant at the moment, a cloistered convent life. I watched as these young women gave up everything of their previous lives, possessions, family. Only able to share with their family through a grilled window, to become married to Christ. As one young woman was talking, she was absolutely bubbling. I thought to myself if you make a decision to spend the rest of your life with a group of people, what about those you don’t get on with? As I thought this almost instantly the question was asked. She replied that as she focussed on Jesus and the shared love of him, gradually over time you don’t see those things which separate, only that which brings you together.

Another thing I recently watched was an interview with John Lennon done in I think about 1971, it was on TV to commemorate 80 years since he was born. The host was a bit tongue in cheek with his questions and also John, along with Yoko Ono was not the easiest person to interview. John Lennon looked incredibly nervous. In the audience were 3 people with bags over their heads full length right down to the floor, this was following an exhibition John and Yoko had recently done. The host brought these 3 out of the audience to I guess have a laugh at John and Yoko’s expense. But John said something quite profound and very relevant today. He said imagine if these went for a job interview complete with their bags on. They wouldn’t be prejudged as to whether they were black or

white or beautiful in the eyes of the world or ugly. In many ways this struck a chord with what the young nun was saying.

I have been researching about my Uncle Samuel Spooner who went almost right through the war, only to lose his life in a Lancaster bomber over Germany in August 1944. I found out that he was based at RAF Helston in Lincolnshire and that his plane was part of 625 squadron. I found the crest of that squadron which was a Lancastrian Rose for Lancaster bomber surrounded by a chain with 7 links in it, one for each crew member of a Lancaster. But the motto at the bottom pulled me up short. It said one word Avenge. This takes nothing away from the bravery and sacrifice that my uncle and lots of other young men gave up in the war and in fact in all wars. The losses on those bombing raids were 50%. How often do our reactions to others involve some form of revenge, we are hurt or upset by someone and want to hit back at them. Just a little bit. Just like those crusaders who went to avenge.

St. Francis de Salas believed the only way to react to people was with love. To let a little bit of the light shine through.

We are at present in situations we perhaps don't like to be in, it's upsetting, and it causes division. No matter where you are at this time, all things are possible through the love of him who first loved us.

1 John Chapter 4 verses 7-16 reads:

*7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*

In John Lennon's song "All You Need is Love" he penned these words:

*There's nothing you can do that can't be done.*

*Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.*

*Nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be.*

*It's easy.*

*All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love.*

*Love is all you need.*

Amen

Before I lead us into prayer, I would like to share with you, my friend Sister Liz.

Sister Liz. She may not have been a Saint by name, but she certainly was saintly.

Sister Liz as she was fondly known by all of Kettering was so devoted to her Lord, as you would expect a nun to be. If you like the program "Call the Midwife" Sister Liz trained and worked for the midwives at Poplar in London. She was a great friend of Jennifer worth who wrote the diaries that the midwife stories were taken from.

But there was so much more to Sister Liz. She was the first English nun to enter a German church congregation shortly after war ended; this is part of a letter. "All priests said it was a mistake to enter a German congregation. But I knew what I had to do, for God and for my country to bring peace and reconciliation". Her whole life was given to doing just that.

She ministered to those in need and walked miles going from Kettering General Hospital to Saint Mary's Hospital and Cransley Hospice, my little Christian bookshop became her stopping place, we would share together, she always brought joy and hope, to those she ministered to, even in their final hours, often in the middle of the night. No she wasn't called a Saint but to me and many other she certainly was.

Let us pray:

God of all time, as we live in these extraordinary times, keep our hearts aflame with the things which please you, mercy, humility, justice, love and forgiveness. Help us all to know through the power of your holy spirit, to be assured of your constant love and blessing in our lives.

Lord there is nothing that is hidden from you and we open our hearts and lives to you fully, you will give us all we need to cope with all our doubts, fears and misgivings.

Fill our hearts O Lord with thankfulness and praise. Help us all to stand firm so that we may truly say not our will Lord, but your will be done.

Amen.

The hymn we have chosen is King of Kings Majesty

## **Singing the Faith No. 331 "King of Kings Majesty"**

King of Kings Majesty  
God of heaven, living in me  
Gentle saviour, closest friend  
Strong deliver, beginning and end  
All within me falls at your throne

Chorus:

*Your majesty I can but bow  
I lay my all, before you now  
In royal robes I don't deserve  
I live to serve your majesty*

Earth and heaven worship you  
Love eternal, faithful, and true  
Who bought the nations, ransomed souls  
Brought this sinner near to your throne  
All within me cries out in praise

Chorus:

*Your majesty I can but bow  
I lay my all, before you now  
In royal robes I don't deserve  
I live to serve your majesty*

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