November 2026

November, already?! I surely can't be the only one wondering what happened to September, which seemed to pass by in a flash, somehow. Having had the blessing of a fortnight's leave in the Lake District in October, along with a couple of days in Wales with my clergy cell group – a mutual support group of people who trained for ordination together – I can appreciate why that particular month seemed to go by quickly.

Now the clocks have gone back and the post-Trinity season of Ordinary Time has ended. So we move into the autumnal season that involves our remembering.

As I write, I am preparing for two funerals on successive days of beloved people who meant a great deal not only to their families and friends but also to one of the churches of our benefice.

Almost immediately we'll be celebrating All Saints – remembering the great saints of the Church - and All Souls, recalling the 'saints' we have known, perhaps in our own families or friendship circles, who have given us a glimpse of the love of God by their lives.

And poppies are now being worn ahead of Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day, when we again recall the costs of war, while conflicts continue to rage in our world.

In both of our benefice churches we have now begun to celebrate All Saints (which falls on 1st November), and All Souls, the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (on 2nd November) in one service. It was not an easy decision to make to do so, as they are distinct points in the calendar, not only in terms of the days on which they fall, but also in the spiritual and emotional freight that they carry.

Still, as is the case in so many churches across the country, with declining numbers and ageing worshippers, it had evidently become too much to ask people to turn out for separate services on successive days. Particularly if it meant coming out when the darker nights had arrived, amid concerns around personal safety or because of the time demands on working or busily-retired folk.

However, it is important that in marking All Saints and All Souls in one service, we don't fall into the mistake of mixing up the two. That would take one of the triumphant feasts of the church year, All Saints, and make it more like a funeral. It's a difficult balance to try to achieve.

The joy of All Saints is that it is *not* a funeral. It is a celebration of the heroic faith of people who have gone before us convinced of the love of God, and the promise of eternal life, and lived out their lives as a testimony to that promise.

Is there, though, a tendency to 'airbrush' the picture of the great Saints, so that we portray their lives as one long uninterrupted act of heroic courage? Or do we confine them to the stained glass images of our churches?

Rather than continuous heroism, I think there was a good deal of everyday 'stuff' and even grind for the saints. I doubt St George was constantly fighting one long battle against dragon after dragon. There would have been other things to do – maintain his armour so it wouldn't

seize up; tend to his horse and tack – and even clean up after the horse, too. He still needed to get in supplies, pay the bills.

This is not to downplay the quality and bravery of their lives. Yet the great saints we recall lived in such a way that every step they took was offered to God in some way, so that their lives became a living testimony to the truth of the Gospel.

Perhaps that is what is really at the heart of sainthood — the will and determination to keep going, to persevere. And that's not a will that emerged all of its own accord, or by our own making, but a will shaped and forged by the daily, patient work of prayer, service and sacrament. It's the everyday work of letting our will and our hope be made in the shape of Jesus Christ's. It is, as our Rule of Life encourages, that we work through our Believing, Exploring, Engaging and Responding each day.

That's not to say that at some great, demanding, world-altering moment, you or I may not be called to an iconic, literal kind of sainthood.

However, it is more likely that it is in the gentle living of our average lives that we will find ourselves, having first given over ourselves for love's sake.

It is in that very mundanity, the everyday grind and perseverance, that sainthood is truly made, as it will have been done by both the great saints and by those souls closer to home for us, who touched the lives of others by their love, care, courage, generosity and selflessness.

As we celebrate All Saints and All Souls, may we honour the distinctiveness of each. And as we honour those who have gone before us, may we recognise that at the heart of all their lives were everyday, 'pedestrian' choices. That is how they, and we, all come to 'run the race set out before us', all the way to the finish line and beyond, as disciples, as learners and followers, of Christ.

Fr Simon