

*Most people cast in their lot with the visible world; but true Christians with saints and angels.*

(John Henry Newman: *Parochial & Plain Sermons* IV, 234)

Be prepared, then, to be misunderstood:

*Because the world refused to acknowledge him.  
therefore it does not acknowledge us.*

It's salutary to remember that the context for both the Beatitudes and the *Book of Revelation* is persecution. Jesus, Mathew and 'John' are preparing people for the full cost of discipleship. Most of us, most of the time, will evade this possibility – and mission to the world easily becomes accommodation. We all want to be liked after all. John Henry Newman is almost relaxed about the possibility of being misunderstood:

*Such people are little understood by the world because they are not of the world; hence it sometimes happens that even the better sort of people are often disconcerted and vexed by them . . . They are commonly unable to enter into the ways and thoughts or feelings of others, having been engrossed with God's thoughts and God's ways. Hence, perhaps, they seem abrupt in what they say and do . . .*

—and much more in the same vein. One can't help wonder how much of John Henry Newman's own character is speaking here: shyness exonerated. But reading the Beatitudes in this light we can also wonder which side of the divide we are really on, for who among us really wants to suffer the approbation of others and would rather put off mourning as long as possible? Who of us would not rather keep a low profile when trouble comes, when the time to speak truth is evident? Or, indeed to suffer truth silently? Donald Nicholl in his penetrating book on 'Holiness' cites the example of C. S. Lewis as a man comfortable with a certain type of Christianity before he 'suffered' marriage and then the devastating loss of his wife. Before, his words of comfort could almost be seen as smug but, afterwards, his words are raw and painful to read: edged with suffering. His faith remains, but of a different order altogether: couched in silence, humbled by the mystery of it all. And I'm reminded of those desperate times when we sat alone with a dying person, or someone no longer able to communicate because of a stroke, or Alzheimers, or someone who has suffered, like C. S. Lewis, the loss of a loved one. Words then fail and what matters is one's presence, however painful that might be. What I'm doing here is very gently prising open the lid on the suffering that All Saints undergo and why we recall them today to help us with our own.

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