

Each day brings trials – some days more than others – and it's easy to miss the longer story that is also going on. We get lost in the trials and in moments of release, measuring our days by trials undergone and overcome; measuring our lives in terms of survival and success, which is the measure the world generally goes by, especially the world of monetary gain, popularity or social media, attractive appearance, war and peace.

But there is another story going on which subverts this story of superficial success and survival: it's not popular: it can't be measured: it can't be reduced to algorithms or controlled, even by ourselves, let alone others. It's a story of pure gift. We experience it as a longing for something more. Not just a release from the struggle for existence but for a meaning which transcends it. And what we find in the Christian story is not only a message that transcends our present struggles, whether we are successful or not, but a message that validates them also. So it's not just about escaping this present life and all its illusions but of living it truly. This is Christ as incarnation: the God who doesn't draw us to another world in which we can leave the rubbish of this one behind but who becomes one like us *in all things but sin* in order to validate this life of struggle whether overcome or not. Indeed, his own life ends in disaster. So success in worldly terms is not at all what it is all about.

This, of course, is preaching to the converted. But is it? How often we mistake our current story for the larger one. I've survived the day – even done quite well out of it, or *in* it – and so God loves me – or must love me, after all. But the blood of the martyrs says otherwise – and the lives of all the saints we celebrate today – so like Christ in their failure to meet the standards of their day. This, of course, raises the problematic issue of how anyone at any time can measure holiness. Best, perhaps, to leave that algorithm to God and focus on the one person with an unequivocal answer: the Christ who came not to *be served but to serve and give his life for the many* – that is, for us, whoever we might be. It's a fabulous myth in the best sense as the philosopher and psychiatrist, Iain McGilchrist recognises:

*I think that the Christian mythos – a word I use without any judgement being formed on its truth or not, because mythos is a form of truth, not a form of deceit – the Christian myth seems to be by far the richest of any of the traditions that I know. It's complicated because it brings together things that seem hard to understand: the part that is played by suffering even to the point of God becoming part of the suffering world, and dying with it, descending into hell and returning to Heaven. These stories are for me fabulously important.....out of these things comes to me great strength.*

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This still seems to me rather impersonal – a matter of of understanding; the truth of it can only come when we allow this Christ to live this same story in us with all its apparent failure. This doesn't necessarily mean we always measure success by failure but may perhaps explain why the Beatitudes are so appropriate for today. Yes, you can have 'success', but recognise it, when and if it comes, as gift. It's not the measure of God's love for you any more than 'failure'.

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