

ON BEING AN ANGEL- Reflection for Sunday 29 September

The churches of Naples are overflowing with saints.

On every wall, in every window and in the multitude of side chapels, the story of a new holy person is unravelled. Tales enough to keep me in sermons for weeks.

What struck me was how little they seemed to have done to qualify. I was particularly struck by the story of St Joseph Moscati - the saintly doctor of the city. He lived from 1880 to 1927 and was declared a saint as recently as 1987.

There is no doubting the way his faith influenced his medical practice and many were blessed by his ministrations. He worked amongst the poorest of the city and never charged any fees. But it was reported that he always came home for a long lunch and it is not clear whether he reappeared for an afternoon surgery.

There are those of us, I know, who like to punctuate our days with a little nap in the middle of the day, so maybe we are in good company!

I like the way this St Joseph had a balance between work and rest and I wonder if it was during his break times that God met him and empowered him.

In our Old Testament reading today, Genesis 28v10-17 - the Lord meets Jacob as he takes his rest after a long day of walking. It is as he closes his eyes at sunset with a rough stone for a pillow that the Lord opens up to him a wonderful vision of what his future will look like and how, through his faithfulness, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

In the Gospel for today (John 1 v 47. - end) Jesus calls Nathaniel and the disciple is initially perplexed at his selection.

" Where did you come to know me? " he cries and Jesus replies rather mysteriously " I saw you under the fig tree".

There is much more to be said of the symbolism of the fig tree here - but we can say that it was as Nathaniel was resting in the shade, Jesus saw to the heart of Him and called Him.

We may conclude that this feast day of St Michael and All Angels is not really about us, but concerns beings of which we know and understand very little.

Yet I think we are all called to their ranks- for we are all His messengers, no matter where we find ourselves, and God may find us most deeply in those moments when we are not sweating and straining to do good, but when we turn aside from those deeds and simply take our rest.

A doctor taking a lunch break, a man trudging through a wilderness, a fisherman under a tree.

Don't let's be so busy trying to be angels on our own terms that we miss the call to let Him bless us in rest and then dictate what we should do next.

"In rest and returning is your salvation. In quietness and trust is your strength " Isaiah 30 v 15.

With love
Andrew