

Luke 6:20-31

At the age of just eight, my Grandson is already a match for me at chess. In order to press home his growing advantage, he has invented a game he calls 'Not Chess' where all the pieces on the board now have new positions and different moves from the conventional game.

I found it almost impossible to adapt to his changes, and as the creator, he was always one step ahead of me.

I think the coming of Jesus into the world was rather like this for the people of faith in those days, and the lists of blessings and woes given by Him at the Sermon on the mount in today's Gospel readings would have turned his listener's lives upside down.

He condemned those who were comfortable and blessed those who were finding life to be a struggle.

At this time of our All Saints festival we might ask ourselves what the difference is between those of us who 'plug along' with their faith as best they can and those great saints of old (and of today!) who seem to achieve such great things, by the grace of God.

I stumbled across an obscure fourteenth century poet named Hafiz, about who little is known other than that he had a Persian background. In his poem 'Tripping Over Joy' he claims that a saint is one who is continually tripping over the presence of God and surrendering to it, whilst lesser mortals have concluded it is down to them to work everything out. Here it is:

"What is the difference between your experience of existence and that of a saint?

The saint knows that the spiritual path is a sublime chess game with God.

And that the beloved has just made a fantastic move.

That the saint is now continually tripping over joy and bursting out in laughter and saying, 'I surrender.'

Whereon, my dear, I am afraid you must still think you have a thousand serious moves to make."

My Grandson's game of 'Not Chess' was carefully worked out on a car journey during our recent holiday in Corfu, but rather than give myself over to his free thinking I was more keen to lure him back to the conventional game, where I would have at least a fighting chance of beating him.

What a shame it is, I thought to myself, that our faith journey tempts us to do the same, when Jesus sets before us so much more joy to trip over.

With love
Fr Andrew