

All Saints Day
Blessed Are the Saints
Matthew 5:1-9
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November 1, 2020

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2

Through Baptism and through faith in Jesus Christ, we are God’s children now. We have been born again, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit. We have been clothed in Christ and all our sins have been washed away. Our new man has been born after the image of Christ. And Scripture says that even now we are being transformed into Christ’s image. Yet, Scripture also clearly says that what we will be transformed into has not yet appeared. We do not yet look like the image of Christ in his glory. Yet, Jesus teaches us in our Gospel lesson that his Christians do indeed look like children of God.

The Gospel Lesson for All Saints Day is from Matthew chapter five, which is known as the Beatitudes. Jesus lists eight blessings in order to describe his Saints. A Saint is a holy person. To be holy means to be set apart. We usually think of saints as those who have gone to heaven. Yet, Jesus points out that God has set his saints apart now on this earth. It is they who are blessed forever. Each of the eight beatitudes describes Christ and in turn God’s Saints, who are being transformed into Christ’s image.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

In Luke’s Gospel Jesus strengthens this statement by saying, “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” No, Jesus is not saying that rich people cannot go to heaven, although he does say that it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle. Nor is Jesus saying that all poor people will be eternally blessed. Rather, Jesus is speaking of those who are poor *in spirit*, that is, those who do not treasure their earthly riches in their heart. A person can be physically very poor, but if he craves in his heart after material wealth and prizes nothing so highly than to be rich here on earth, then his heart will have no room for God. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So, even if someone owns great wealth here on earth, he can be poor in spirit, if he does not let these

riches steal his heart, but considers them nothing. This is the example we receive from such saints as Abraham and King David, who were immensely wealthy, yet considered themselves poor and needy before the Lord.

Of course, no greater example of being poor in spirit exists than that of Christ Jesus, the Divine Monarch of heaven, who possesses every hill and field, heaven and all the stars therein. Yet, he was poorer than the birds and the foxes, because he had no place to lay his head. Jesus did not seek to make himself rich on this earth, but instead treasured God's Word and stored his treasure in heaven.

And this is how the saints live while they are on this earth. Whether God makes them rich or poor, they remain poor in spirit and sing, "And take they our life, Goods fame, child, and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won; The Kingdom ours remaineth."

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Again, there is no better example of one who mourns than Christ, who wept over Jerusalem, because he knew the judgment that befell her. He wept for his friend Lazarus, because more than anyone he understood the tragedy of death. St. Luke intensifies these words by recording Jesus say, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." Now, this does not mean that Christians must always be sad and mourn. Indeed, we have much to rejoice over and many times are we filled with laughter. But by contrasting Christians with those who laugh now, Jesus teaches us that the saints do not rejoice in the things of this world. Like those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn do not seek joy in this sinful world. They mourn with Jesus over those who have rejected the Gospel. They mourn sin. They mourn that marriage is despised, that children are unwanted and even killed in the womb, that sexual immorality runs rampant. They mourn that children leave the church after once confessing the faith before all. And they will not be comforted by the superficial and transient pleasures of this world. They will be comforted only by their Savior Jesus, who will rescue them from this veil of tears.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

To be meek means to be lowly and humble. No one was lowlier than Jesus Christ, who being in the form of God took on the form of a servant. He did this with utter confidence that God's plan of

salvation would be accomplished and that he would inherit the new heavens and the new earth. To be meek presupposes faith. Do not fight and scrap for your foot-breadth of earth. Rather, listen to the comforting words of King David, “For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.” (Psalm 37:9-11) To be meek is to live with confidence that God will reward your labors according to his good time.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

No one desired righteousness more than Christ Jesus, who fulfilled the demands of God’s Law in perfect love, and in order to satisfy God’s wrath against all unrighteousness, made atonement for all sins on the cross. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to desire that God’s will be done and that all that is good and right is accomplished. As sinners we know that we ourselves are not righteous. Through faith we desire a righteousness that is not our own and God satisfies us by forgiving our sins and clothing us with Christ’s righteousness. Yet, a Christian, reborn and washed clean of all sin, is not satisfied to then go back to his sin! A Christian desires to continue in righteousness. Yet, we find another law dwelling inside us that serves the law of sin! We hunger and thirst to live a righteous life. And we desire to dwell in a righteous land, because we desire what God desires. Yet, in this life this desire seems to go unfulfilled. We still sin. And like righteous Lot, we torment our souls as we witness evil around us. This is the hunger and thirst that Jesus speaks about. It seems to be unfulfilled, but Jesus promises us that we will be satisfied. In heaven there will be no sin. Our hunger will be satisfied. We will live in righteousness and purity forever.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

Anyone who has read the Gospels knows how merciful our Lord Jesus is. He had pity on the sick, lame, and hungry. He felt compassion for those lost without a shepherd. And his mercy was shown to the extreme when he saved us from our sins and made us God’s children. Jesus illustrates well what it means to be merciful in his story of Judgment Day from Matthew 25, where he says, “Then the King will say to

those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ And when the righteous show ignorance of ever doing these things, the King answers, “Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

And so, God’s saints, who have received abundant mercy let it run over by showing mercy to Christ, whom they find in their neighbor. By thinking of others and their needs, God’s saints on earth feed the poor, clothe the naked, and pray for those persecuted for Christ. You don’t have to leave your family or town to go and show mercy either. In your everyday life, God gives you opportunities to show mercy and kindness. This is also why saints defend the life of the unborn, who are naked and defenseless. Christians must be wise as serpents and gentle as lambs, however. There are those who try to convince Christians that it is merciful to kill these defenseless children. This is greatly displeasing to God our Father, who creates all life in the womb. Killing unborn children is never merciful.

The greatest mercy that has been shown to you is that God has forgiven you all your sins. This is why we pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” As we have been forgiven, so we forgive. Saints forgive those who do them wrong, confident in God’s mercy for them.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

To be pure in heart means to have a non-polluted heart. This is something that only God can do, as King David and all Christians pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” A pure heart is a heart that desires only what is good and to be close to God. This is done not only through Baptism, but by continued hearing and learning of God’s Word, and continued reception of the Sacrament. A heart is polluted by idol talk and noise that is common in this world, that seeks to draw your affection to life’s vain pleasures. Saints strive for a pure heart by repenting of their idolatries and vainglory and seeking to learn from God from the pure fountain of his holy Word. And God promises that those who seek him through his Word will see him face to face.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

One of the most endearing sights is watching a young boy intently study his father and set his feet the way he does, place his hand on his hip the way he does, mimic his facial expression and even repeat common phrases of his dad. Sons take after their fathers. Our heavenly Father is a peacemaker. And His Son Jesus Christ came to earth with the angelic announcement, “Peace on earth; Goodwill toward men.” Scripture tells us that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. To reconcile means to turn an enemy into a friend. That is the very essence of being a peacemaker. God made peace with us through the blood of Jesus’ cross. And we, having been cleansed in that blood from all sin and having been made God’s children through faith are now peacemakers. We mimic our Father in heaven.

This means that we look at every friend with the desire of preserving that friendship and at every foe with the desire to be reconciled. If anyone has sinned against you, seek to forgive him and make peace. Do not spread a bad report or bear fast witness, but speak well of your neighbor and explain everything in the kindest way. If you are maligned, then return hatred with kindness. As far as it is in your control, live at peace with one another. This is how you imitate your Father in heaven.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Jesus repeats this beatitude because of its importance and its great comfort. Jesus was persecuted for righteousness’ sake. He laid down his life for what is right and in so doing, he saved our souls. And we Christians who bear Jesus’ name through Baptism and faith must also suffer persecution. Persecution is unpleasant. Perhaps the most difficult thing about persecution is that it is easily avoidable. John the Baptist could have kept his head had he not preached against King Herod’s unlawful divorce and incestuous remarriage. Jesus’ disciples could have lived out their days in peace and comfort had they not devoted themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel. Many Christians’ lives would be spared in Islamic

and Communist countries if they would simply conform and deny Christ. And you and your children can escape much unpleasantness if you compromise your faith and ignore God's Word when it is unpopular.

Yet, Jesus teaches his disciples to not get discouraged when they suffer for following his teachings.

Rather, rejoice. For such suffering is a sign of being a saint who is blessed forever.

Jesus teaches us these eight beatitudes to instruct us on how we should behave here on earth as Christians set apart by God, as well as to comfort us when we suffer and we cannot see the evidence that we are children of God. We are children of God through faith. And the works and even the suffering and mourning that follow are fruits of faith, which Jesus uses to comfort us with a sure promise of eternal blessedness. May God increase in you such fruit and grant you eternal blessedness. Amen.