

ALL SAINTS HOMILY 2020

Revelation 7: 2-4, 9-14 + Psalm 24: 1-6 + 1 John 3: 1-3 + Matthew 5: 1-12a

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: November 1, 2020

During the past 5 Sundays in Matthew's Gospel, we have been with Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem as he confronts the religious leaders of Israel. They try to trap him and to discredit him. He speaks the truth to power with great humility in the hope they will turn away from their self-righteous, judgmental ways and turn back to the Living God.

This great and joyful solemnity of All Saints breaks the pattern of these consecutive Gospel passages from Matthew and takes us all the way back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Matthew's Gospel. There he lays out his vision for the Kingdom of God in the Beatitudes, inviting his disciples to live as He lives and to love as He loves. The Beatitudes are Jesus' plan for the never-ending adventure of holiness. as he teaches us his disciples what being a saint looks like.

We celebrate All Saints Day every year not only to honor and rejoice in the holy men and women whom the Church has declared are definitely enjoying the fullness of life in heaven. We also remember our vocation, for we who are baptized into Christ Jesus are all called to be saints.

We are all adopted children of God by baptism, joined to the Son of God. This union with Him is meant to transform the way we live in this world, as we live out of this deepest identity of ours as beloved sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. United to Christ Jesus, holiness is possible, as all the saints teach us. Apart from him, nothing of lasting value is possible, for we become like dead branches cut off from the living vine, dead limbs severed from the tree of life.

When we live out the Beatitudes with Jesus, we fulfil his 2 great commandments to love. The Beatitudes are the way Jesus loves the Father with His total being and how he loves others. So, they are our way to love as Jesus loves and so love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

For the Beatitudes shape our love of God the Father after the pattern of Christ's self-sacrificing love.

Living out the Beatitudes means our way of loving becomes "*Agape love*," loving as Jesus loves.

For the Beatitudes stand in direct opposition to the attitudes of a world separated from God, propelling us along the way of the Cross with Jesus.

So this blueprint for holiness, this way to deeper Communion with Jesus, looks like foolishness to the world, but the Beatitudes are God's folly of love. What looks like absolute foolishness to the world is the wisdom of the way God loves.

When we wrap our lives around the Beatitudes, we will be persecuted as Jesus was.

That is why the 8th and 9th beatitudes speak about the blessing of being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for as we live out the Beatitudes, we are united to the suffering Christ in a very special way.

In a world scarred by resentment and vengeance, blessed are those who are merciful.

In a world where many hunger and thirst for more money or more power, blessed are those who thirst to right inequities, who hunger for justice.

In a world wounded by violence and division, blessed are those who work for peace and love their enemies with Christ's help.

The Saints learned that all of the Beatitudes spring from the first Beatitude, and it is first because it gives life and meaning to all the ones that follow.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" could be literally translated as "*How fortunate those who beg for their life's very breath!*"

Indeed, these are the fortunate ones, who recognize that their very existence is wholly dependent upon God's mercy and providence.

We human beings depend on God in the very same way that our lungs depend on air which comes from outside of us.

Our life each day, our very existence on this earth, does not come from us, but from outside of us, from God.

So we cry out, "*Have Mercy on us, O God!*"

Self-forgetfulness—living for others—characterize those who are poor in spirit. An interior emptiness is another mark of this Beatitude, in direct contrast to those who are so full of themselves, puffed up and proud and self-righteous.

Those who are poor in spirit are naturally meek, knowing themselves to be always and everywhere loved by God. Because they embrace their identity as a beloved child of God, the meek reject the way of aggression. They have no need to have power over others but bend their knee in adoration of God by serving others. The meek are strong in transmitting God's goodness and mercy, because they are disposed to receive everything as a gift. They expect nothing from the world and desire only to GIVE to the world!

Those who are poor in spirit are also pure of heart, focusing their gaze only on God and turning away from everything else. This purity of heart means one's heart is undivided, that one is solely interested in doing the will of God and giving oneself completely to God. Then all the other "loves" of one's life will fall into their correct order beneath this all-consuming love.

Notice that the Beatitudes do not include what some religious people would think would be essential. Jesus does not say: "*Blessed are those who pray, who fast, who give alms.*" These good works mean nothing if done with pride instead of poverty of spirit.

Francis and Clare, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux and Ignatius of Loyola, Stanley Rother and Michael McGivney, all made Jesus and his teaching the most important thing in their life. The Gospel was their guidebook and the Beatitudes their signposts to help them find their way home with the Lord Jesus to their heavenly home. May they be ours as well.

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