

All Saints' Day (observed), 2008

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

First Reading: Revelation 7:2-17

Epistle: 1 John 3:1-3

Title: Blessed...

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Blessed are the rich, for they have everything they want.  
Blessed are the young, for they can take care of themselves.  
Blessed are the assertive, for they take without asking.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for power, for they shall control the world.  
Blessed are the strong, for they will overpower the weak.  
Blessed are the corrupt, for they will always make a profit.  
Blessed are those who tear others down, for they will get ahead in life.  
Blessed are those who only look out for themselves, for no one will get in their way.  
Blessed are you when you lie and deceive those around you, as long as you don't get caught.

Now we know that's not how it goes, but that is the message we hear everyday: the truly blessed are those who are strong, those who are wealthy, the young, those who are able to take care of themselves, those who don't have to rely on other people, those who do whatever it takes to be successful. We look down upon those who are weak, helpless, and reliant. Sure, we're happy to take care of those in need, but there's nothing good about being needy, is there?

We look up to the leader, the self-made man, the kind of person who doesn't need anybody for anything. Just look at those running for office. Their message is always the same: I've got the all answers, I've got a plan, I've got the right experience, I'm strong, I'm successful, and I can solve all your problems if you only give me the power to do so. Would you elect someone who was meek? Would you vote for someone who was poor in spirit? No, you want someone aggressive, a fighter, someone who is a strong leader. You want someone in office who is independent, who commands authority. That's what people respect.

But there's a problem with this. There's a problem with relying on yourself and your own strength and ability to carry you through. Ultimately your own strength will fail. You will find yourself in a situation that you can't work your way out of. It may be illness. It may be family problems. It may be financial problems, but sooner or later we all come to realize how weak and helpless we really are.

Not only will your physical strength fail you, but your spiritual strength as well. No matter how hard we try we are not able to please God. We can try to live a good life, try to treat others well, try to follow God's law, but our strength is not enough. We just can't do it. Spiritually, we are not strong, we are weak. We are not rich, we are poor. But when we come to realize this, that's a good thing.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Blessed are the spiritually poor. Blessed are those who do not rely on their own good deeds or their own moral strength. Blessed are those who know their sinfulness and their shortcomings. For kingdom of heaven belongs to you. Not because you’ve earned it or deserved it, but because you’re poor. The church is not for those who lead perfect lives, who have everything put together. No, the church is for sinners who need forgiveness. The church is a place for the needy to come and receive good things from the Lord.

This is what makes you a saint- receiving everything from the Lord as a gift- not in living a good life, but in confessing your sinful and in being made holy.

Your sinfulness will cause you to mourn. When you see the hurt and the harm your sinful actions have caused, when you come to know the consequences of your actions, it will make you deeply sad and remorseful. But don’t worry. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. You will be comforted by the gospel, the good news that your sins have been paid for, that the Lord still loves you.

Your sinfulness will make you meek, shy, and timid. You will not trust yourself to do or to say the right thing. But don’t worry. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. You will be given a place in the new creation.

Your sinfulness will make you hungry and thirsty. You will come to know how empty your life is because of sin. You will crave something better, something wholesome, something that will last. And you will receive it. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. The Lord will fill you with His righteousness. He gives you His body and blood and joins you to Himself. Come to the Lord’s table and receive the righteousness of the Lord and do not be hungry or thirst any longer

Because you have been forgiven, because you have been shown mercy, you now show mercy to those around you. Mercy flows from the Lord to you and then out to those around you. Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

The Lord shows mercy to you by purifying your heart. He creates in you a clean heart, removing impurities and the stain of sin. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Sinful man cannot see God and live. The holiness of God is simply too intense to survive. But you have been purified. You will see God, look Jesus in the eye, you can even touch Him on the nose.

With your pure heart, you are now at peace with God and with one another. Sin separated you from God and made you His enemy. Sin creates conflict with those around you. But free from sin, you are now at peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. You have been made a part of God’s family. No longer an enemy, you are His beloved child.

Yet there is a cost to discipleship, to this sainthood we have been given. You will be persecuted because you don’t fit it. You will be insulted and people will tell lies about you. Yet even this is a blessing. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is what disciples are like. This is what saints are like: because we are sinners, we are poor in spirit, we mourn, we are meek and we hunger and thirst for righteousness; because we are forgiven we are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted.

We are like this because this is what Jesus is like.

Who is poor in spirit, but Jesus Christ, who humbled himself, making himself nothing and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross? The kingdom of heaven is His, and He reigns from the throne of His cross.

Who is He who mourns, but Jesus Christ, who mourns over Jerusalem, weeping for the sins of His people? His Holy Spirit is the comforter, which gives comfort to all people.

Who is meek, but Jesus Christ, gentle Jesus, meek and mild? Like a sheep before his shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. His is the earth and all that is in it. He will come again to judge the living and the dead and His kingdom will have no end.

Who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, but Jesus, the Righteous One? He was without sin, and He freely gives us His righteousness.

Who is merciful, but Jesus, who has shown us all mercy, not punishing us as our sins deserve, but showing us His mercy, taking God's wrath upon Himself?

Who is pure in heart, but Jesus, the Holy One of Israel? He was innocent, and His pure heart was pierced for you. When you see Jesus, then, you see God, in all His purity, in all His holiness, dying out of love for you.

Who is a peacemaker, but Jesus, the Prince of Peace? His death makes peace with God. "Peace be with," Jesus says, and it is so. He truly is the Son of God.

Who was persecuted but Jesus Christ, who suffered insults and mocking, beatings and thorns, nails, spear, and shame all for you?

The beatitudes are a picture of Christ. Because Christ is in you, the beatitudes are a picture of you and All Saints- forgiven sinners- poor, mourning, meek, hungry, merciful, pure, peaceful and persecuted- and the Lord has given you the kingdom.