

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

All Saints Day has been observed since the 4th century. In England, it was known as the day after All Hallows Eve (which we know as Halloween). The dates, November 1 and 2, were established in the 9th century. So, these are deeply rooted traditions worthy of commemoration. All Saints is meant to provide an opportunity to honor all of the saints of the church, known and unknown, throughout history, while All Souls is similar but designates all those who have died (and particularly those who have died in the past year). For Anglicans, All Souls is simply an extension of All Saints Day, and it recalls those who have died in connection with the doctrines of the resurrection of the body and the communion of saints.

Our Gospel reading for the day is the *Beatitudes* from St. Luke's account which we know as the *Sermon on the Plain* in chapter 6, verses 17-49, a portion of which was read this morning. This is entirely appropriate in that the message of the Beatitudes should be evidenced in the lives of the saints of the church. We have all heard these passages so frequently that they have no doubt lost their edge for us, so it is appropriate this morning that we should try to recapture what Jesus was saying in these famous words.

The basic thrust of this sermon comes from what Jesus meant by the term *kingdom of God*. This kingdom was all about "a glorious, uproarious, absurd generosity" --- the generosity of God. In essence, we are told to think of the best thing we could do for the least worthy person we can imagine, and then simply do it. Or, think of what you'd really like someone to do for *you*, and then do it for them.

A simple idea, of course, but imagine a world in which this were true. It would be unrecognizable to us because what we know is the world as it is presently constituted, and it is not a world which takes its cue from the idea of generosity of spirit. Thus, when we contemplate what the world would really look like if we took this message to heart, we can at least begin to imagine the kind of generosity God represents. In other words, that new world would tell us about *the nature of God* himself and, by extension, his goodness would permeate everything.

But the point, of course, is not to provide a rule book, a list of do's and don'ts, but rather the inculcation of *a whole new outlook*, a whole *new way of looking at life and our neighbors*. The Beatitudes illustrate an attitude of heart and a lightness of spirit which would revolutionize the world we inhabit.

That is why these words still ring true. That is why these words are so hopeful. That is why we read them on All Saints Day in recognition of what individuals can accomplish when they put God at the center of their lives.

So, what do we learn from the Beatitudes about the nature of God? Well, he is “generous to all people, generous (in the eyes of the stingy) to a fault: he provides good things for all to enjoy, the undeserving as well as the deserving. He is astonishingly merciful (anyone who knows their own heart truly, and still goes on experiencing God's grace and love, will agree with this); how can we, his forgiven children, be any less? Only when people discover that *this* is the sort of God they are dealing with will they have a chance of making this way of life their own.”

And what is the result of all of this? “If you lived in a society where everyone believed in this God, there would be no violence. There wouldn't be any revenge. There wouldn't be any divisions in class and caste. Property and possessions wouldn't be nearly as important as making sure your neighbor was all right...life would be exuberant, different, astonishing.”

Luke's Gospel (and the book of Acts which is volume II of a two-volume work produced by a single writer) have long been recognized as one of the most important resources within the Scriptures for developing a Christian ethic of stewardship, justice, and benevolence.” You can see this, in part, through the appearance and re-appearance of the disadvantaged and the marginalized throughout this gospel.

And while it is true that the Bible doesn't give us a comprehensive ethic for Christian economic life, “Scripture does leave us with one consistent moral imperative: the integrity of the people of God, as the people of God, is dependent upon their sustained and concerted effort to eliminate poverty from the goodness of God' good creation.”

This is never more true than in the Gospel of Luke which has prompted experts to write whole dissertations on the vocabulary alone used in his work to describe the poor and to place them in the context of an honor/shame society. That is, if honor was symbolized by family and wealth in antiquity, loss of honor could be symbolized by loss of family, land, and wealth.

And we see this in Luke's use of the Greek terms for "esteemed" (or honored) and their opposites "disreputable" or in his many "shame on" statements. This cultural context is essential to understanding Luke's take on the words of Jesus in his *Sermon on the Plain*.

The people who listened to Jesus preach recognized that "power was flowing out of him and people were being healed." His whole life was one of generosity, and he was speaking about something he knew intimately, the great love his Father has for the Creation. Even when they struck him on the cheek and ripped his coat and shirt off his back, he went right on loving and forgiving. He showed love not only to his friends but also to his enemies, "weeping over the city that had rejected his plea for peace." It is entirely true that he was the "embodiment of the God of whom he spoke."

His instructions here in the Sermon on the Plain are simple and scarce. But that simplicity hides the difficulty of following them. They are scarce because it is hard to think of any example of a person following them in the way Jesus himself did. And that is why we read this passage on All Saints Day to recall the singular lives of those people in the past who have come close to following these guidelines for living.

Jesus is not here delivering an abstract definition of discipleship or sainthood but "calling all (who) hear to become faithful and effective agents of God's reign here and now." And this reminds us that All Saints Day is "a witness to God's way of blessing the world, not simply reinforcing the entitlement of the privileged to the way things are," but rather revealing "God's justice fulfilled in mercy."

Jesus brought God's way of ruling the world down to earth in "the Lord's Prayer" and invited his disciples into that holy venture: "a vision of God's reign which he embodied."

I like this version of the Beatitudes which I read recently in some commentary on Luke's version of the *Sermon on the Plain*. And what I like most about it is how it reminds me

of those lovely words from Holy Baptism when the priest says “you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever:”

Blessed are you when you are poor...when you are in want or need...feeling isolated or cut off...when the budget is tight...the job is lost...the debt collector is calling...I and those you love are with you...you are not alone...this is not the end.

I am with you always...so there is always hope.

And blessed are you when you weep...when you are grieving...when you have been passed over...torn down rather than built up...when you feel like you have lost someone you can’t live without...the sadness won’t be forever...your tears will turn to joy...for life and love have won and are made eternal in my resurrection...you will see those you love again...death has been defeated.

And blessed are you when people revile you for my sake...remember there is a great cloud of witnesses...the communion of saints that stand with you...who cheer you on and promise to pick you up and remind you who you are and to whom you belong...being an expression of love and standing up for those without a voice is always worth the cost...indeed you are a blessing to me and those I love.

These are the words of blessing we hear Jesus speak to all the saints of God, even you and even me. Jesus says you have my blessing...my love...my presence. I love you...you are my child...I am pleased with you.”
You were marked as my own for ever when you were sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism.”

Almighty God, give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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