

Sermon for All Saints Day, Year A

The Text: Matthew 5:1-10

"She has the patience of a saint!" "He's a real saint!" Sometimes that is said of a person who is extraordinarily kind or who shows integrity and help to others in significant ways. As we mark All Saints' Day celebrations today, you might recall having heard this said about others and even acclaimed someone in this way yourself.

Our instinctive human way of thinking tends to understand sainthood and holiness as something earned and worked towards by moral strivings or disciplined devoutness. Jesus' own words in today's Gospel reading are often interpreted in that way—as moral instruction, prerequisites for Christian discipleship, - conditions for God's blessing. But unlike Moses' teaching on Mount Sinai, Jesus' teaching on the mount in today's text is not "Thou shall not" or "this is what you must do". It is "*Blessed are you*". Jesus is not giving his hearers a plan for how to reach holiness. Jesus isn't setting up the conditions of blessing, but he is actually blessing his hearers.

This is clear from Jesus' opening words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit". To be poor in spirit - spiritually poor - is our natural human condition ever since Adam and Eve placed their own will ahead of God's in the Garden of Eden. After they fell to the Devil's temptation one of the first things they did was to try to hide from God and even blame him. Paul says in Romans 6:23 that, since that time, the wages of sin is death. Each of us in our natural condition are spiritually destitute, without resource. Jesus' opening words today embrace all human beings, for by nature all people are poor in spirit. Our spiritual needs must be met from outside of ourselves - from God himself.

Those who recognise that they have nothing within to help themselves and who look to Jesus for their righteousness and salvation are already blessed. God has given them faith to recognise that spiritual riches come from God in Christ, in whom the Kingdom of heaven has come into this world. In the person of Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven comes to us personally too, when he baptised us into his death and resurrection. By the Holy Spirit sent through Jesus from the Father, God washed us clean and made us holy, gathering us into his church, the communion of saints. He continues to wash us and make us holy through his absolving of us each Sunday.

Through his word he sends his Spirit to continually make us holy in his truth. Through his Holy Supper he continues to make us holy and gives us the food to sustain us as he leads us on our pilgrimage to our true homeland in heaven. Through his holy and precious blood he continues to bring forgiveness, life and salvation as he serves his holy meal to the holy people of God.

Through these means God strengthens us in faith so that we do mourn over our spiritual poverty and are sorry for our sins. We are made meek, joining John the Baptist's confession of Jesus that "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). God is at work in us so that we do hunger and thirst for his righteousness. He changes us so that our hard hearts soften and beat with his mercy towards others. We receive his own holiness and purity.

That's God at work, blessing us in the first place, before we're even capable of earning it. He blesses us to be recipients of his ongoing blessing:

- ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
- ⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
- ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
- ⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
- ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
- ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
- ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is the author, source, and the fulfilment of the Beatitudes, for you. So as we commemorate All Saints Day, it's important to know that the value God places on any of our loved ones or any of us here is not dependent on what we are able or unable to do. God didn't wait for us to get it right with him and measure up to his requirement of perfection. **He'd still be waiting!** But it is on the basis of Jesus' performance who perfectly fulfilled the Law for us. It is Jesus' own holiness that we receive in connection with him. Though we sin Christ has made us pure in heart, and he says: blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. It is because of Christ's striving that you are already God's saints - his holy, blessed children with full access to the Kingdom of Heaven and all the grace and strength therein, for your life on earth each day.

For our loved ones in Christ who mourn over their sin and trust Christ for their communion with him and all God's people, Jesus promises blessing: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." That's why the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 ring true: "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve like those who have no hope."

We can grieve as those who have hope, for when we look to the Cross, we see a gracious God who loves the world so much and who does not desire our punishment and death, because he sent his only beloved Son into the world to suffer and die on the cross to take away the sins of the world, even yours and mine. It was when we were poor in spirit, that our Heavenly Father opened the storehouse of heaven and lavished his riches on the world, sending his only Son as the peacemaker to make peace between us and God by his shed blood, a gift more precious than any earthly sum.

It was on another mount, Golgotha, that Christ the King of Heaven became poor for us all. He, the meek one, was obedient unto death; he, the one pure in heart, took our spiritual poverty and impurity upon himself. He who had no sin became sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Through trusting in this saving work of Jesus God says of all his faithful people that 'Christ's righteousness is your own', as if we lived as perfectly as the Son of God himself. Because Jesus suffered persecution and was abandoned on the Cross, God will never abandon us, no matter what we face. But he will face it with us and he will comfort us and bring us peace through his precious gospel.

Listen to the incredible blessings he speaks to us: "Blessed are you who are poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you shall be filled. Blessed are those who mourn, for you shall be comforted. Blessed are the peacemakers, for you shall be called children of God. And even if you are insulted or persecuted for bearing the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that God put on you at your baptism, Jesus assures the faithful that you belong in the Kingdom of Heaven and the devil himself cannot take that away from you.

No matter what we experience in the valley of painful life, Jesus will comfort you and me, he will bring us mercy and peace, he will assure us of our place in heaven. Stand firm in faith, for then together we will see our loved ones in the faith who have gone before us, and we will see the prophets who were persecuted before us, and the apostles and all of God's holy people, and the angels who rejoice with us, and we will see our Saviour, the Christ. How can we be so sure? Because he promises us: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Amen.

Now may the peace of God that is deeper than our human understanding, keep all our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen