

All Saints' Day (transferred)
St. Matthew 5:1-12

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

On All Saints' Day, the Church remembers. She remembers those saints who have gone before, suffering persecution and even dying for the faith. She remembers those saints who have, by the grace of God, served the Church and world with lasting contributions. Her members usually remember those friends and loved ones who have now entered eternal rest.

But, what does it take to be a saint? A saint is one who is sanctified—made holy—one who has no sin. Therefore, if you are without sin, you are a saint, too.

What does it take to be a saint? In the Gospel lesson, Jesus recited the "Beatitudes," qualities of those who are blessed to be saints. This is a passage of Scripture that stands out for many, and one that carries with it great joy and blessing. However, it is also one that is often twisted and misunderstood to lead to despair.

As an intro to treating this text, I offer this statistic by way of illustration. At one time, according to something I once read, 85% of all drivers in America considered themselves "above-average drivers." Of course, this cannot be true—by definition, just under 50% of drivers are above average. However, this survey gives an insight into human nature: people generally view themselves as better than others. And, if they are better than others, then they are doing a good enough job.

This transfers over into religion far more than you may be aware, and it becomes apparent in how these Beatitudes are often taught. Often, one will hear, "The message of the Beatitudes is that, if I do these things well enough, then I will be happy. If I am good enough at these things, then I will be blessed." It's a human standard of measure: "If I am better at this than average, then I'm in good shape." But does this work for sainthood? Well, take a look at the Beatitudes and see if you are good enough at keeping them. A short sampling should do the trick.

Jesus declares, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Indeed, the Scriptures make clear that the saints of God will enjoy eternal life with a new heaven and a new earth; and Jesus declares here that saints are meek.

Meek and humble are synonymous to a degree; in fact, many thesauri list them as synonyms. Being meek means putting others and their needs over and above your needs. Being humble means not drawing attention to yourself, especially when doing something for which you would otherwise receive recognition and praise. Most simply, they both mean to put others before self.

More directly, meekness is power under control. One who is meek uses his authority, position, and skills in service to others, not himself. So, are you meek enough? Do you use your authority, position, and skills in service to others? How about your resources, because they're a part of this, too? Do you use them, particularly what may be considered excess—that which is more than what you need for yourself—in service to others? Do you put others before yourself?

I could go on and ask more and more questions about meekness, your meekness, but when such an examination goes on and on, the response of the sinful nature is, "Sure, I could be meeker, but I am meek enough to my satisfaction," or, "I am comfortable with my level of meekness toward others." But here is the thing: Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek." He did not say, "Blessed are those who believe that they are meek enough." When He calls for meekness, He calls for perfect meekness; it is not your measure that matters, but the measure of God. To believe that you are meek enough, according to God's standards, is arrogance and pride—the very opposite of meekness!

Jesus declares, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." To hunger and thirst for righteousness is earnestly to desire the things of God—holiness, faith, purity, etc.; and those who hunger and thirst will seize every opportunity to be fed. If surveyed, people will give a variety of answers on what it means to hunger and thirst enough for righteousness. Some will propose that it is enough to attend worship on Christmas and Easter, while others will hold out for four times a year. Some will maintain that every-Sunday attendance indicates an earnest desire, while others will add mid-week services during Advent and Lent, or even the rest of the year. Well, can a hunger and thirst for righteousness be connected to something other than or in addition to worship—do you have daily devotions? Are they long enough? Do you attend a Bible Study? Do you devote enough time to personal Scripture-reading and prayer? Have you memorized enough portions of Scripture and the Catechism in your hunger and thirst for righteousness? Or more simply, are you a good person engaged in good works at all times and to all people?

Once again, the response of the Old Adam is to say, "I hunger and thirst for righteousness enough because I'm satisfied with my efforts." Even—and here's the kicker—"I'm comfortable with my hunger and thirst." But Jesus does not say, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst by their standards." He offers no qualifiers. To believe that your hunger and thirst for righteousness is enough is, again, a most unrighteous arrogance and pride.

One more ought to do it—or do you in. Jesus declares, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Once again, to see God is a privilege of the saints, who will see Him in glory for eternity. Of course, to be pure in heart, you have no thoughts of lust or covetousness, mischief or malice. You are perfectly satisfied with the things that you have, perfectly trusting when trials arise. You are not affected by prejudice, nor would you ever indulge in gossip or grudge-bearing. Now, I know of no one—Christian or non-Christian—who claims to have a heart that is absolutely pure; it's impossible! That's why the Old Adam comes up with this seductive line: "I'm only human, and I could be a lot dirtier than I am—and like some people are." But listen once again to the Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart," says Jesus. He does not say, "Blessed are the purer in heart (you know, those who are just a little bit cleaner than all the others)." If you say or believe that you are pure in heart—or even pure enough in heart—you give proof enough that your hearts are far from pure.

Remember where I started with the Beatitudes, with the common teaching that, "If you do these things, then you will be blessed and happy," and it is thought that this is all doable. This is a misleading teaching, because you must do these things perfectly, all the time, to earn the blessing and enjoy the happiness. Once you examine what these Beatitudes require, you are far more likely to cry out, "Enough of the Beatitudes! They promise blessings if I do them, but I cannot do them. Enough of the Beatitudes! They are more than I can do."

And if that is what you cry out, then blessed are you. Blessed are you because, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, you have made an honest confession of sin. You have examined yourself by the unflinching mirror of God's holy Law, and you have concluded that you cannot live up to it. If it is up to you to be meek and merciful and pure, you are without hope. Amen. This is most certainly true. You now agree with the Law of God that you can do nothing to please Him or earn your salvation. You are now prepared to hear about the One who has saved you, who showers these blessings upon you.

So, woe to you if you believe that you can achieve holiness and sanctity by your keeping of these Beatitudes. If you believe that you have done enough in the way of meekness and mercy (and all of the rest) to earn God's approval and become a saint, then you argue against Scripture—you make God to be a liar—and are headed for despair. Woe to the one who believes he does a "good enough" job of righteousness to please God.

And woe to anyone who preaches and teaches this Law to you in anything less than full strength. It is always an attractive temptation to proclaim these Beatitudes as if they are something

within your power. It is tempting to urge you simply to be meek and humble, merciful and peaceful, promising that you will be happy if you do these things well enough. If that is what anyone tells you, then they have done you a grave disservice. For one thing, they teach you that you can—by your own reason and strength—do these things to God's satisfaction. Far worse, if they teach you that you can do it, then they teach you that you do not need a Savior because you can save yourself. Woe to the one who preaches that you can fulfill the Law.

So, enough of the Beatitudes! At least, enough of this idea that you can become happy and blessed if you do these things well enough, for it will never be. No, God grant that, by faith, you agree with His Law and make this blessed confession: "I, a poor miserable sinner justly deserve thy temporal and eternal punishment." Such a confession means that you're ready to hear of the One who has done enough.

Though you cannot fulfill the requirements of these Beatitudes, they are, by no means, to be shunned. For one thing, you need to know of your sin. For another, these Beatitudes give you the opportunity to rejoice in your Savior, Jesus Christ. He has kept these Beatitudes perfectly. What's more, He has kept them perfectly for you. Listen, marvel, and rejoice.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," says Jesus. No one has been poor enough in spirit, except Him. Marvel at this godly, unending humility during the Savior's journey from conception to cross. Had He demanded that He sit on a throne and be served, hand and foot, by all, He would only have asked for what He deserved. But, He did not come to be served but to serve—and to give His life as a ransom for many. (cf. Matthew 20:28) Humbly, the almighty Son of God served those around Him. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, taught the sinner, forgave the penitent, raised the dead. He did not practice pride and demand service. He served, even to the point of death on the cross. He was poor in spirit enough that you might have the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Jesus mourned—not just the death of a loved one like Lazarus, but the killing sinfulness of man. He mourned for Jerusalem, that her inhabitants would not repent. (cf. Matthew 23:37) Furthermore, He paid the price for sin on the cross—that your mourning might be turned to dancing. (cf. Psalm 30:11) Jesus did more than mourn—He saved you from eternal mourning. He mourned, that you might be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Remember, meekness is power under control, used in service to others. Jesus did not use His omnipotent power for His own profit, but in service to others—He cured diseases, multiplied bread and fish, and cast out demons. When beaten and spat upon by sinners, He did not wipe them out with a word; meekly, the all-powerful Son of God allowed Himself to be crucified. He has been meek, so that you might be delivered to the new heaven and the new earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Remember the Temptation of Christ, for in the wilderness Jesus suffered hunger rather than listen to the devil's temptations and turn stones into bread. He hungered enough for your righteousness there, that you might be filled with forgiveness. Remember the words from His parched lips near death: "I thirst." He has thirsted and died on that cross, that you might be filled!

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." To be merciful is not to give an evildoer what he deserves. Again, the Lord Jesus did not destroy those who arrested Him, blasphemed Him, mocked, and crucified Him. He could have; He could have come down from the cross, saved Himself, and destroyed them utterly. Instead of giving them what they deserved, He spared them and died for them, to give sinners what they do not deserve: forgiveness. Instead of condemning you, He forgives you. He has been merciful, so that He might give mercy to you forever.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Of Jesus, Hebrews 4:15 declares, "For

we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Jesus was perfectly pure in heart—and why? Hebrews 4:16 says that because He was without sin, you can go before His throne of grace with confidence. Jesus has been pure in heart, so that you might see God in glory forever.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” The Lord Jesus Christ made peace. He made peace between man and God by breaking down the wall of separation between the two, by removing the sin that kept him from God’s presence. He has made peace, so that you are sons of God and heirs of heaven.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you 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.

And who has been persecuted more for righteousness' sake than Jesus Himself? Who has been reviled and persecuted and spoken evil of more falsely than Jesus? He has done these things enough, and so His is the kingdom of heaven. But, once again, He has done these things for you. He shares His victory over sin and death with you, and so yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Do you see? When you see what you *have* to do to fulfill the Beatitudes, you should see that you cannot do it—not even close. “Enough of the Beatitudes! We cannot do them.” Looking at them through the lens of the Law, they only show you how deep and dark your sin is—how terrible your failures are. But look what happens when you look at the Beatitudes and Christ: now you see your salvation! He has fulfilled the Beatitudes—He has done these things perfectly, and He has done them for you. The great exchange has taken place: Christ Jesus has taken away your sins at the cross—He has suffered God’s wrath for your failures to be poor in spirit, meek, merciful, and all the rest. But in taking away your sins, He has not left you with nothing; instead, He has given you the credit for His obedience—for His keeping of the Beatitudes. Because He has done so, God the Father looks upon you and says, “I see no sin in you, because My Son has taken it all away. Now, for His sake, when I look at you, I see one who is poor in spirit, mournful, and meek, earnest for righteousness—holy! Yours is the kingdom of heaven.”

How odd it may seem at first: You do not become holy because of how well you fulfill the Beatitudes. Rather, you are made holy because, because by grace, the work of having fulfilled them is imputed to you, given to you, made yours through Jesus Christ and for His sake. Furthermore, by the work of the Spirit, you confess that you cannot keep them as you ought, and if you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. (cf. 1 John 1:9) This is why the life of the Christian is one of continual repentance—confessing your sins and rejoicing that Jesus has done what you could not do, and has done it for you!

What does it take to be a saint? You need to be without sin. And so you are—not by your work, for it is never enough, but by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. He has done the work and paid the price to make you holy. Therefore, dear hearers in Christ, blessed are you, His saints, because you are forgiven for all of your sins!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.