

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY, YEAR C, NOVEMBER 2, 2025

Why do we read the Beatitudes for All Saints Day? Perhaps it's because they are the blueprint for how we are to live our lives and what those, who we call saints, have attempted to do. If you want to know what Christianity is really all about, if you want to know what Jesus is all about, then you need to look no further than the Beatitudes.

Now the Beatitudes show up twice in the New Testament, first in Matthew's Gospel and then in Luke. In Matthew chapter 5, they are part of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. In Luke's Gospel they are part of what is called Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. Matthew's version is much longer with nine blessings while Luke gives us four blessings but pairs these blessings with four woes.

Now the Beatitudes have been called the greatest wisdom teaching of Jesus. Both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi understood the Beatitudes as fundamental to their activism. Why? Because in the Beatitudes Jesus turns the values of the world upside down and proclaims that God's values are very different.

Blessed, he says, are the poor, the hungry, and those who weep. Blessed are those who are hated and reviled because they stood up for the teachings of God's Kingdom. Conversely, Jesus says, it's the world that will tell you that you are blessed when you are rich and comfortable, laughing, and well liked. But I say to you, be warned, God does not favor the wealthy, the comfortable, or the famous.

What Jesus is saying is that when you are wealthy, comfortable or famous it's easy to think that one does not need God or that you are totally independent of God. Furthermore, wealth, comfort, and popularity can blind you to the truth of the suffering around you. If you choose not to use your wealth to help others than woe is you. Because in the end if your life is all about money and your comforts and your public persona they are meaningless when you are on your death bed because you can't take it with you.

These blessings and woes that Luke gives us this morning, along with the other parts of the Sermon on the Plain, are very difficult to comprehend and digest. They tell us who God favors and who we should favor as well. They demand of us behaviors that are challenging to say the least, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Make no bones about it, these are tough commands, and some have said that the history of Christianity is a history of Christians trying to evade the Sermon on the Plain and avoid living according to its plain meaning. But this is Jesus. These are the things that Jesus stood for, the things that Jesus did in his own life. These teachings, these Beatitudes are the essence of the Gospel. There are the essence of what the kingdom of God is all about which is here and now. However, these very Beatitudes have come under attack by many Christians as being too liberal or woke. I kid you not.

I have mentioned before the movement called Christian nationalism. It is a movement that believes America is God's chosen nation and as such Christianity must be the country's primary religion, while all other faiths should be secondary. There are deep racist overtones in the movement because many Christian nationalists define America as a white protestant nation, and they believe that God demands them to do

battle, in whatever manner they can, to make it that way. It is a dangerous movement and if you look closely at this movement, you can see that Christian nationalism isn't Christianity at all, but a political ideology that shrouds itself and wraps itself in the trappings of Christianity. In Christian nationalism, they invoke the name of God while pretending that God only serves them. This turns God, our ultimate creator and redeemer into nothing more than a mascot

Many pastors who have spoken the loudest against Christian nationalism come from churches and denominations who proudly call themselves conservative and evangelical. Some of those pastors who have preached on the Beatitudes have been confronted by parishioners who ask them "where did you get such "liberal" nonsense." When told that these are Jesus' words they usually reply, "well those words are weak, outdated, liberal talking points and they just don't work in today's world?"

If, you want to know the way of Jesus it has nothing to do with American exceptionalism or Christian nationalism and everything to do with the words of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain. As Pope Francis once said, "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges is not a Christian. This is not the gospel. . . We need to build up a society in light of the Beatitudes, walking towards the Kingdom with the least among us."

On this All Saints Sunday, as we remember the saints of old, we remember that by virtue of our baptisms we are all called to be saints. Here are two definitions of saints that sum it up pretty well. Saints are the forgiven who know it, act upon it and live by grace without angling for recognition. Two, the saints are those men and women who relish life as a gift and who realize that the only way to honor such a gift is to give it away.

Our job as Christians is to mold our lives so that we too can be placed within one of these definitions. We don't have to be bishops, priests or deacons to be saints. We don't have to be mystics, monks, or theologians to be saints. We don't have to be anything special to be a saint, we only have to be willing to align our lives with Jesus and his teachings especially in the light of the Beatitudes, where the needs of the world are great and the realities often difficult to employ.

When we volunteer at a food pantry, when we bring food for the WholeSum pantry, when we help at Family Promise serving or making meals, these are just small things that we can do in our own way to live into what the Beatitudes demand of us. Did you know that just in Bergen County there are 25K people who receive SNAP benefits? To be eligible you can't make more than \$35K a year for a family of 3. Every town has someone receiving SNAP benefits including Haworth. 70% are families, 20% are seniors, 35% are children, 10% are people with disabilities, and 4% are veterans. We know this is a tough time for many people. I encourage all of us, if we can, to donate food to the WholeSum pantry or to any program that helps those with food insecurities. Let me be very clear. This is our Christian mandate to help the hungry, the poor, the immigrant, those who have been excluded and vilified. Those who have been disparaged and forgotten.

You see being a saint is not about holiness it's about newness. Being a saint is about becoming infused with the life of God and knowing that helping others in the name of Jesus is what we as Christians is foremost in our lives. Being a saint is about being a person with a passion to make a difference in a world in need of love and mercy. Being a saint is about seeing someone, who those who the world considers worthless or useless, as precious. As H. King Oehmig once said, "Being a saint is about becoming a

person, and a member of a community, whose purpose is to face in two directions: to face Christ in faith, and to face our neighbor in love.”

In today’s Gospel, you have in front of you what’s been called the Christian life in a nutshell – the Beatitudes. These words describe the way of Jesus. So, hold them close, pray on them, wrestle with them, and live by them as best you can, because in the end it is the only way to life. Amen.