

## Sermon for the Feast of All Saints – Matthew 5:1-12

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Blessed are the rich, for theirs are the yachts, vacation homes, and big screen TV's. Blessed are the independent, the self-sufficient, the "I'm-strong-enough-on-my-own" types, for they did it their way. Blessed are the young families with an appropriate number of children, for they are the envy of society. Blessed are the braggadocios, for they have the world in their pocket. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for wealth, for their bank accounts are overflowing. Blessed are those who feel no sorrow over their sin neither true repentance, for nothing will be able to penetrate their hardened hearts. Blessed are those to who show no mercy, who demand that every wrong be righted, who easily take offense, and who fight back against their opponents with slander, gossip, and outright brutality, for their wrath will be abated – at least for a little while. Blessed are the tolerant, for their glass houses continue to stand tall. Blessed are you when others are proud of you and praise you for being a non-judgmental Christian who speaks no words of admonition against sin and thereby quietly avoids persecution. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in this fleeting world.

Dearly beloved, let's not forget that this world has its own beatitudes, too. Let's not forget that we too have been caught by them – hook, line, and sinker. We love this life more than we love our Lord and His Word. But why yolk ourselves to this fallen world and its broken philosophies when we've already been redeemed for God's eternal kingdom?

In spite of the lies and half-truths this world would tell us and sell us, Jesus gives us truth and thereby gives us life. Jesus begins His Sermon on the Mount with the beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ..." The poor in spirit, mourners, the meek, the hungry for righteousness, and the persecuted – these ones are unknown and undesired by the world. Do we dare to join their ranks?

In Jesus, we already have. He became poor in spirit, even descending from the throne of God to take upon Himself our flesh and our sin. He mourned the death of his friend Lazarus. His hunger and thirst for righteousness drove Him to die on the cross for us. By His mercy, we see God. He is the Peacemaker between God and men, so that we are called sons of God. He was persecuted so that we can inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. He was reviled and slandered so that our reward is great in heaven.

The verb tense of the beatitudes is significant. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven." Not "theirs WILL BE the kingdom of heaven," but IS, as in right now. To be sure, the mourning, meekness, and mercy must always be among us in the here and now, too. But this doesn't negate the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven is ours now. St. John said it this way, "... we are God's children now, and what

we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”

The Kingdom of heaven is ours. It's not a distant, far-away place, rather this Kingdom is right here in our midst right now. The Gospel is here in the present, has dwelled here in the past, and will be here in the future and forever. The church's hope and comfort already exist in the preached Word and administered Sacraments. The Gospel tells us that the kingdom is coming and the sacraments tell us that it has come. The Kingdom of Heaven which belongs to us is the Lord Jesus who was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and He suffered and was buried. And the third day he rose again according to the scriptures and ascended into heaven. The kingdom of Heaven has no political boundaries and flies no national flag. She has no president or king and gives allegiance to no earthly ruler. She speaks many languages, yet has one constitution, only one confession. The boundaries of the one holy catholic and Apostolic church are established by Holy Baptism. She is fed and nourished by Holy Communion.

For us, our claim as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and inheritors of eternal life is never an abstraction or obscure notion. It's a concrete reality. How so? It has been a tradition for our parish-family on this day, All Saint's Day, to list those among our ranks who have entered into glory with Christ through death. New life is given them. Am I speaking of those saints listed as the faithfully departed to the church triumphant or the list of those newly baptized into Christ? Yes! Both! Saints are made in Holy Baptism. Saints' Baptism is completed in death.

For the saints who have gone before us, those listed in our bulletin, as well as the others who have gone before us, we should honor them. We should give thanks to God for them as God has shown them (and us!) great mercy. This strengthens our faith. When we see St. Peter's denial of Christ forgiven, we are encouraged all the more that God's grace truly superabounds over sin. Their faith we do well to imitate, each with accord to his own calling.

Of course these saints were flesh and blood. As sinful human beings, they failed. But even in their failures, Christ Jesus never failed them. Nor will He ever fail us. For though He was persecuted, He did not return violence. He shed His blood so that we might wash our robes and be made white in it. As we hunger and thirst for righteousness, "Take, eat, the Body of Christ given for you ... Take, drink, the Blood of Christ shed for you." By Baptism into Christ the angel's words are not less true of you: "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." "Rejoice and be glad, for great is our reward in heaven." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠