

I.N.I.

“Blessed to Be a Blessing”

Homily for All Saints Sunday, A – 5. Nov., A.D. 2017 ✠
St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, 2958-59th St., Sacramento, CA 95817

“The Sermon on a Mountain: Beatitudes”

Matthew 5:1-25 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them:

3 “Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless.
The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

4 Blessed are those who mourn.
They will be comforted.

5 Blessed are those who are gentle.
They will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God’s approval.
They will be satisfied.

7 Blessed are those who show mercy.

They will be treated mercifully.

8 Blessed are those whose thoughts are pure. They will see God.

9 Blessed are those who make peace.
They will be called God’s children.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing what God approves of.
The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you,
lie, and say all kinds of evil things about you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad because you have a great reward in heaven!

The prophets who lived before you were persecuted in these ways.
[GOD’S WORD Translation]

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen (Rm.1:7)

I happened to notice in our monthly newsletter that our Council President gave us the good news that we are officially entering the colds & flu season. Well, he’s probably right, and if someone sneezes here today, what would we say to them? Perhaps “Gesundheit” or, more likely, “Bless you,” - - - - and you’d **be** blessed.

But what does it mean for the saints of God today to bless, or to be blessed?

Can we accept that **we** are “**blessed to be a blessing**” to others—that **we** can **ble**ss!

Some of us here today may think that they are **cursed** because of how life has gone.

Jesus used the word “blessed” eight times in today’s Gospel’s eight **Beatitudes**.

But in his related Sermon on the Plain in the Gospel of Luke (ch.6) Jesus said the word blessed only four times, and “woe!” four times.

The Greek for ‘woe’ here means “a state of extreme hardship or distress—pain,” - - - - almost as bad as “cursed.”

And that takes us to **Part I** where the bad news is that **God Has a Curse For Us. Point One: Who of Us Has a Problem With That?**

Have you ever thought about the fact that God gave Moses the Law on a mountain, and here Jesus, God’s Son, gave his sermon on a mountain.

Jesus could have chosen any place, but he chose a mountain.

The Ten Words from Mt. Sinai revealed God’s **Law** and the consequences of sin. Jesus spoke **blessings** from his mount! He knew the symbolism of his actions.

I Am
Blessed...
To Be A
Blessing

Two different revelations given on two different mountains - - - both by the same God.

And the problem with that? The first mountain, Sinai, made necessary the blessings from the second mount, because the Law given on that first mountain? - - - we break it regularly - - - that's a problem.

Second Problem: On a Deeper Level We Believe the World's Lies About Us.

Christians all over the world are being attacked for their faith, even in the USA.

Jesus said in his sermon there would be times **“when people insult you, persecute you, lie, and say all kinds of evil things about you because of me. The prophets who lived before you were persecuted in these ways.**

The news last week showed the wall of a compound in Africa with the letters UNICEF stenciled on it, meaning that the United Nations was providing a safe place for persecuted Christians there.

But behind the wall was nothing but rubble—no Christians—no safe haven for those running from Muslims—the UN has been lying to us, U.S.

So now, Vice President Pence has announced that the present Republican administration will go around UNICEF and provide safe compounds for Christian refugees from our own resources.

Here in the US we are being told more and more that Christians are no good, and perhaps that explains at least part of the serious decline in membership in many mainline Christian churches today.

The problem in our hearts is that we begin to believe the lies about our faith.

Point Three, Such Uncertainty Leads to a Deeper Level of Problem.

It can lead to an eternal loss of the blessedness our Lord Christ brings.

To believe the lie about us, writes Pr. Steven Kuhl, “spells doom because, as Luther notes, with God, ‘what we believe is what we have.’”

Not living in the blessings our Lord brought is to lose them—perhaps eternally.

St. Paul writes to the Galatians, **“... it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.’”** (3:10 NRSV)

To sum up Part I—God sees right through us when we break his Law by believing the world's lies about us Christians, when we become afraid of persecution and no longer live in the blessings our Lord pronounces upon us, and that's very bad news.

The good news is that God not only sees through us, which is the function of the law from Mount Moses, but he also “sees us through” all our doubts and waywardness and false beliefs, which is the good news of the gospel. - - - - So,

Part II, A Mountain of Blessing Is Offered to Us

Point one, An Eternal Blessing Awaits Us, the Problem Children.

Jesus told his disciples that they were already blessed, because he already saw the results in their lives: they were the meek, who mourned over their sins, who were already poor in spirit by following him in faith, and so on.

But it was not from *Sermon Mount*, as little as from *Mt. Moses*, that their trust was rewarded.

There's another mountain in this story, and possibly you've thought of it already—*Mt. Calvary—Golgotha—Skull Knob*.

There on a Roman cross hung our Savior to pay the cost of our blessedness.

What is blessedness? As defined by Dr. Alan Richardson in his Theological

Wordbook..., it is, "***the active outgoing of the divine goodwill or grace.***" [Cf. Alan Richardson, *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, McMillan, 1950, p.33]

We are blessed by God's **grace**, God's free gift—only so have we a Savior from sin, death and the devil.

On **Mt. Calvary** we see whether his promise on **Sermon Mount** is true—whether it can outlast the law's claim upon us or not.

And by raising him from the dead in three days, God the Father showed his approval of the blessings bestowed on Sermon Mount.

Believing in our Lord's resurrection gives us and every believer the blessing of eternity "before the throne and before the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9)

Then, Last Point, How Shall We Respond in Our Blessedness?

First, we remember—today is a celebration for **All Saints**, all those set apart by our Lord in Holy Baptism to be holy before him, set apart for serving others.

Then we look around us to see our fellow saints here in the Lord's house Sunday for Sunday and pray for the ability to be of service **to** them and **with** them.

Plus we could respond in thanks to God for a **saint** whose story I'm about to tell you.

Her name is Mary. One Tuesday morning she opened the door to a little girl in dirty rags who held tightly to a little aluminum paint can. Whatever she did, wherever she went, Kathy took the paint can. She took it to the breakfast table and to bed w/ her that first night. In the shower the paint can was only a few feet away. When anybody would ask her about it, she would just say, "This is mine, this can belongs to me." Mary asked her if she wanted to tell her what's in it." Kathy said, "Um, not today." When Kathy was angry or hurt she would take the paint can to a quiet room, or she would sit on her bed and rock gently back and forth holding the can. Some times she talked to the can in a whisper. One morning Mary invited Kathy to share breakfast w/ her, and decided to say, "Kathy, that's a really nice can—what's in it?" For a long time no answer—she rocked back and forth, then looked at Mary and said, "It's my mother." "Oh, what do you mean?" "It's my mother's ashes—I went and got them from the funeral home—see the label?" There was a name and two dates w/ a dash between them. Kathy hugged the can and said she never really knew her mother, "cause she threw me in the garbage two days after I was born." Her story checked out in the New York papers—an infant found in a dumpster. "I lived in a lot of foster homes mad at my mother, but then I tried to find her. I got lucky—someone knew her—I went to her house, but she was in the hospital, dying of AIDS. I went there and got to meet her the day before she died, and, Mary—my mother told me that she loved me"—Kathy was crying—"she said she loved me." Mary hugged Kathy as she cried for a long time—it was awkward because she wouldn't put the paint can down. Mary checked her story—every word was true. [Letter, 11.1.17, Covenant House <covdove.org>]

You might like to know a little more about Mary, whom I've called a saint—she's Sister Mary Rose, President emerita of Covenant House, which one year took in about 51,000 homeless kids - - - - in Hollywood, California.

How might we respond in **our** blessedness? Give thanks to God for the Sister Mary's of this world, and support them with our gifts as we are able.

That's what God's saints do, all who trust Christ, past and present—we are **blessed to be a blessing!** Amen.

S.D.g.

The Rev. Dr. Donald Schedler, Snowline Hospice Chaplain,
Diamond Springs, CA, Retired.

[1465 Spoken words] Iowan Old Style 11; Georgia 10; Arial Bold 10.