

All Saints, November 1, 2020 (Mt 5:1-12; Rev 7:9-17; Ps 34:1-10, 22)

The holy gospel according to Matthew, the 5th chapter (5:1-12):

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:

- 1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
- 2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**
- 3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**
- 4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**
- 5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**
- 6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**
- 7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**
- 8. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
- 9. Blessed are *you* when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

This is the gospel of our Lord!

“Blessed are you!” These are the words I’d most like to hear from God when I meet him at the pearly gates—right up there along with, **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”** The *blessed* ones are those on whom God bestows his favor, and I’d like to be able to claim that.

But there’s a problem in Matthew’s version of the Beatitudes, the *blessings*. All but one of Jesus’ words of blessing are spoken about *other people*! **“Blessed are those who . . .”** And I wonder, where does that leave *me*?

The Beatitudes are among the most beloved words of Jesus, because they give hope to people who in *this* life have *little* hope. The “rewards” of being blessed, in Beatitudes 2-7, are all in the future; those who live by these guidelines **WILL** be blessed some day. Only numbers 1 and 8 are in the present tense, and the blessing is the same: **“for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven.”**

Take a look at these two present rewards: The **“poor in spirit”** and those who are **“persecuted because of righteousness”** have already made room in their lives, their hearts, and their minds for **“the kingdom of heaven.”** They live *now* in the presence of God, and can enjoy the fullness of his blessings in this life.

But wait—read #8 again: **Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** How in heaven’s name can it be a *blessing* to be *persecuted*? Odd as this may sound, this strange proclamation sums up all the other Beatitudes. *Anything* done **“for righteousness’ sake”** is done for God.

And that brings us to #9, the only Beatitude addressed to “you.” **Blessed are you when people 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.**

Here’s the \$64,000 question (you older folk will remember that TV game show): *When was the last time you were criticized or made to feel uncomfortable because of your faith?* When, for the sake of your love of Jesus, did you last do something, or take a stand on something, that was unpopular with people who live by this world’s secular values? According to Jesus himself, we are **blessed** when we’re being persecuted because we let love trump hate!

Throughout the gospels, Jesus is criticized by the scribes and elders, the chief priests and Pharisees, because he’s more concerned about *people in need* than he is about following the letter of the law. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is criticized for being *countercultural*.

- He reaches out to touch the untouchable, like lepers and foreigners.
- He associates with sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes.
- He heals people who aren’t even *Jewish*!
- He chastises the religious leaders who so scrupulously adhere to the *letter* of the law, even while they neglect to **“do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with their God”** (Micah 6:8).

Today, some 2100 years after Jesus’ death on the cross for *our* sake, these Beatitudes hold up a mirror to our hearts and souls. The word “blessed” probably had the meaning of “full of honor in regard to God.” Read the Beatitudes with this in mind, and consider

- how full of honor you are before God when you take an active part in bringing about God’s reign of justice, mercy, and love on earth.
- how greatly honored you are by God if you help to usher in a time when there will be no more faint spirits (#1); no mourning because of inequality or injustice; no hungering or thirsting for basic necessities that provide life and dignity for all (#4).

Two days from now all citizens who haven’t yet voted will have the opportunity to participate in electing the man who will lead our country for the next four years. A Christian committed to the righteousness of God has the obligation to exercise that right to vote, and to make informed decisions about who shall make and administer the laws of this state, and of this “one nation under God.” Never in the history of this country has there been such polarization of one side against the other.

Our faith isn’t complicated. **God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

All Saints, page 3

Jesus told us in the Beatitudes how to live a God-pleasing, counter-cultural life. Those verses were his vision of life in the kingdom of heaven, where every-day values like “me first” and “I want it now” are stood on their heads.

Life in the kingdom is straightforward: Love God, and love your neighbor. Jesus told his disciples, **Love one another as I have loved you.**

I beg you to vote for the candidate who most strongly represents the love of Jesus; who shows respect and compassion for everyone; who speaks the truth.

