The Beatitudes and the Universal Call to Holiness

All Saints: The Universal Call to Holiness

Gospel Reading: The Beatitudes

The sermon begins with the Gospel according to Matthew. Seeing the crowds, Jesus goes up a mountain, sits down, and teaches His disciples. The Beatitudes describe those who are blessed in God's kingdom:

- The poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- The meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
- The merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- The pure in heart, for they will see God.
- The peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Those persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Those reviled and falsely accused because of Jesus, who are called to rejoice because their reward is great in heaven.

Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12. This passage opens Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The pastor presents the Beatitudes as more than ideals for a select few: they reveal the qualities of faithful disciples and the shape of holiness.

All Saints and the Call to Holiness

All Saints' Day celebrates not only the well-known saints whom the Church honors by name, but also the countless unknown men and women who lived and died in the faith. The pastor describes them as a vast multitude, alluded to in the first reading: people who received the sacraments, remained faithful, and lived their lives without public recognition.

The saints are a "great cloud of witnesses" who can be asked to pray for us. Their witness also shows that holiness is not reserved for a small group of extraordinary people. The call to holiness is universal: every person is called to become a saint.

For some, that calling may involve heroic acts, visions, or public recognition; for many others, it may mean simply living and dying faithfully.

The pastor humorously describes the hope of reaching heaven as going “straight to heaven” without complications. His central point, however, is that the path to holiness is unique to each person, while the call itself belongs to everyone.

The Saints Remain Ready to Learn

Before considering the Beatitudes’ meaning, the pastor draws attention to the disciples’ posture: they sit and listen as Jesus teaches. The saints, he says, share this readiness to be taught. No saint considers himself or herself beyond the need for Christ, Scripture, the sacraments, or continued formation.

The practical challenge is to avoid assuming that familiarity with the faith means there is nothing more to learn. Discipleship requires humility and a willingness to keep listening to Jesus.

Letting Go of False Sources of Happiness

The pastor then considers ways people commonly seek happiness that the Beatitudes challenge. These include accumulating possessions, trying to save or fulfill ourselves through our own will and goodness, and withdrawing from the world in the hope of finding happiness in isolation.

He observes that people today possess more material goods than most people in history, yet abundance does not guarantee happiness. The saints show a different way: they sit at Jesus’ feet and become His disciples rather than treating possessions, self-reliance, or escape from the world as sources of salvation.

Poverty of Spirit and Possessions

The Beatitude “Blessed are the poor in spirit” challenges attachment not only to possessions but also to the desire for them. The pastor names St. Francis of Assisi as a striking example of a saint whose life was marked by radical poverty and detachment.

He distinguishes being materially poor from being “poor in spirit.” A person may have little while still centering life on the pursuit of more. The deeper challenge is to loosen the heart’s dependence on possessions and to trust God.

The Beatitude about mourning also speaks to loss. The pastor suggests that times of lacking or grieving can become occasions for grace rather than proof that happiness is impossible.

Righteousness Instead of Self-Will

The modern promise of self-fulfillment, the pastor argues, is a false one: it suggests that people can make themselves happy by removing obstacles and pursuing whatever they want. But human life depends entirely on God; we cannot fulfill or save ourselves.

That dependence does not make people puppets. God created human beings in His image and likeness, and the pastor presents freedom as part of that gift. Yet freedom is not simply doing whatever one desires. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to seek justice and consider others' needs, rather than putting oneself first.

The pastor contrasts this with the common advice to prioritize personal desire. He questions what that approach has produced, referring to the danger of war and economic collapse as signs that human self-interest does not create lasting peace or security.

Mercy Instead of Ruthlessness

The Beatitude "Blessed are the merciful" challenges a world in which people may imagine that the ruthless succeed. The pastor uses familiar stories and entertainment—including *House of Cards* and *Game of Thrones*—as examples of narratives centered on power and ruthlessness, while observing that their characters are not models of happiness.

Mercy means refusing vengeance and resisting the impulse to "finally show" someone. It means willing the good of another and placing that person's good before one's own. The pastor connects this to a previous Sunday's teaching about willing the good of others.

He says the saints practiced this through obedience to God and attention to people in need. They recognized Christ's voice in the vulnerable and responded to those most in need.

Purity of Heart and Salvation by Grace

The pastor rejects the idea that a person can be saved simply by being "a really good person." Salvation is found in Jesus Christ, not earned by good actions. He connects purity of heart with recognizing that whatever is good in us—and whatever good we do—depends on God's goodness and grace.

The temptation is to approach God as though personal virtue makes grace unnecessary: "I've made it myself." But if people believe they have no need to be saved, they are no longer looking to Christ as Savior. Goodness is not a reason for pride or self-sufficiency; it is a gift that points back to God.

Scripture allusion: The statement that salvation comes through the one name given under heaven alludes to **Acts 4:12**. The pastor's application is that salvation rests on Christ and His grace, not on human achievement.

Peace Means Union with God and Service to Others

The pastor next addresses the desire to escape the difficulties of ordinary life—to remain on holiday, on a beach, or on a mountain, removed from family problems and other people's needs. He acknowledges the appeal of this idea with a lighthearted reference to holidaying in the Bahamas and to the contrast of being on a beach with the misty weather of November.

The closing Beatitudes make clear, however, that Christian life cannot be reduced to private comfort. Jesus blesses those persecuted for righteousness and those falsely accused because of Him. The pastor asks how anyone could be accused of following Christ if the words of Jesus never leave their lips or if they hide their faith completely.

A quiet life is not necessarily a peaceful life. The pastor distinguishes the absence of conflict from true peace, which he describes as union with God. God wills that people be saved and draws all nations to Himself; therefore, disciples are called to live their faith in connection with others, not merely to seek private spiritual comfort.

He gives the example of the Carthusian monks during the English Reformation under Henry VIII. Though contemplative and withdrawn from public life, they were among the first people killed in that period. The example underscores that religious withdrawal does not guarantee safety from persecution, and that the Christian call to holiness must be understood in relation to the whole Church and the world.

The community of the Church is called to be Christ's voice, hands, and feet. The saints witness to Christ through lives of faith and service, and the Beatitudes will take different forms in each person's life.

Taking Discipleship Seriously

The pastor's final emphasis is that all the saints take discipleship seriously. Whether they were martyrs, people who experienced visions, or people who lived quietly holy lives, they took their faith and the service flowing from it seriously. They did not dismiss learning about the faith as unnecessary.

He identifies the fruits of the Holy Spirit as marks of Christian life, especially joy. The saints were not defined by sourness, harshness, or misery. The pastor remarks that he has not encountered a saint characterized by being nasty to children or

frightening to others. Rather, people who met the saints saw something of Christ in them. They also had a sense of humor and a joyful spirit.

Application and Closing Prayer

The congregation is challenged to live the Beatitudes in the particular circumstances of each person's life:

- Remain teachable and keep listening to Christ.
- Loosen the desire for possessions and place trust in God.
- Seek righteousness by considering others' needs, not only personal desires.
- Practice mercy instead of vengeance.
- Recognize that salvation and every genuine good depend on God's grace.
- Live the faith openly and serve others as members of Christ's Church.
- Take discipleship seriously and cultivate the joy that reflects Christ.

The sermon closes with a prayerful hope that the congregation will reach its heavenly homeland and join the multitude of saints. The pastor encourages everyone to live the faith fully, faithfully, courageously, and joyfully.