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Matthew 5:1-12
Festival of All Saints
November 1, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, the Beatitudes, in which Jesus teaches us of the Christian life and comfort, as the text says: “ He opened His mouth and taught them.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Though we don’t sing it on this Festival of All Saints, the fourth verse of the hymn “Praise the Almighty” ties in well when it confesses,

*Blessed, oh, blessed are they forever
Whose help is from the Lord Most High,
Whom from salvation can nothing sever,
And who in hope to Christ draw nigh.
To all who trust in Him, our Lord
Will aid and counsel now afford.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

Notice what the hymn confesses as the help from the Lord with which the saints are blessed: first, salvation – from that salvation nothing can sever us. Second, faith’s confidence/certainty to draw nigh and call upon our Savior. Third, aid and counsel. All three of those blessings for the saints are on display in the beatitudes of our Gospel reading, aren’t they?

And that's an important truth for our assurance, for all of life in this fallen world – from our sins to others' sins against us to all the consequences of life in this broken creation – all of it daily threatens us to despair and to ask whether it can be remotely true that we who experience all these things can possibly be blessed!

In fact, here's a good mental exercise: take the phrases of the hymn and flip them (take the opposite thought), take the words of the beatitude and focus on the 'opposing thought,' and do they not imply what it is we desperate sinners understandably have weighing upon us in this broken world? The line of the hymn says, "Whom from salvation can nothing sever," and yet doesn't it seem that we always have reason to fear our spiritual depravity? The parallel line of the Beatitude says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And yet, isn't that exactly how we worry – whether ours actually *is* or could even possibly *be* (on account of our sin) the kingdom of heaven. Isn't that exactly why we know temptation is so dangerous, because sin ingested and adored *would* sever us from God Most High. Isaiah the prophet says, "Your sin has separated you from your God." And, long before Isaiah, Moses (in his final sermon to the Israelites – as some of us have been reading in the Calvary at Daily Prayer readings...) Moses was reminding Israel that those who were stubborn against God's will and plans would be *cursed*. Indeed, while the "Beatitudes" (the Blesseds) are countered in the New Covenant by the "Woes" spoken to the religious leaders,

in the Old Covenant, the Lord promises to *curse* those who refuse His will, but to bless those who live dependent on His will.

Yes, there is such threat and danger of our sin separating us from our God and severing us from His love. And yet, in Christ Jesus, St Paul says, nothing will separate you from the love of God. Because of Christ Jesus, and by His very Word and the promise of his very mouth (in our Gospel reading), *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”* ... blessed are those who recognize the poverty of their righteousness and who hide in the beauty and completeness of Christ’s righteousness... for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.” Notice that – present tense! – theirs *is*. Even while all the world threatens you and rages about you and crumbles around you, none of it can undo the righteousness of Christ; none of it can undo the work of his cross and the blood of his sacrifice; and, thus, nothing can separate you from God’s love in Him. Blessed are the poor in spirit... because of Christ, yours even now is the kingdom of heaven.

And that great truth that bookends in present tense beatitudes (“theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven” – both at the beginning, and at the end of the reading) ... that great truth that bookends those future tense beatitudes in between, upholds the Christian’s faith and grants us every certainty to have hope in life’s darkness and draw nigh to Christ for his protection and safety. Isn’t that what the Beatitudes say next?

“Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.”

And “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” We need that hope, don’t we? For, when we live life in this world, we often feel there is no hope. We often know days of mourning, days of meekness. This year has yielded a major dose of that reality. On the one hand, we could speak on a very physical, temporal level – the mourning of sickness and death during the year of a pandemic, the feeling of meekness when we fear society is shifting away from “my preferred candidate, my way of thinking, my desires for my society, my hold and influence on the ‘will of those on earth’.” But, on a deeper level having to do with spiritual need and eternal life, don’t we mourn and know meekness? – mourning death for a world that knows not eternal life; knowing meekness as a Church that is unknown by this world and as a Church that wonders whether its inheritance in Christ will ever come to pass.

Yet, consider our other readings for the day: In our first reading, John beholds the beatific vision of heaven which *promises* the Church that those Christians who mourn in this world, those baptized into the suffering and death of Christ in this age, will come out of the great tribulation wearing those robes whitened by the blood of the Lamb... and He will wipe away every tear from your eye.

Likewise, those Christians who know meekness in this world, those who are baptized into the life of wandering as sojourners in this world, who know the intense daily life feeling of being a

foreigner in this world... that this world is not their inheritance, nor their promised land... doesn't the Epistle reading say of these meek ones of relative isolation, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know [God.]" (Notice, John's epistle doesn't ignore or downplay the reality that the world doesn't get the Christian... when your church wants to be loved by the world, that's the first big red flag it is becoming part of a world that doesn't know God!) "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, 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.*"

There's your inheritance! There's what it means for the meek to inherit the earth. Christ will come in his glory, Judge and King over all the earth, and He will raise you from the dead, and you will *see him as he is*. And, He will give you a share of all that is His... and as He is firstborn over all creation, you will be second-born of that new creation. Meek no more; outnumbered no more; foreigners and strangers in the world no more. Instead, a room in the Father's kingdom, a seat at the banqueting table, a no-longer silent majority of eternal proportions that will know the feast of Zion... "where they shall hunger no more , neither thirst anymore" ... but rather (as the Beatitudes say) those who hunger and thirst for righteousness *shall be satisfied*. Satisfied at the feast of Zion, gathered with angels and archangels and all those who have come out of the great tribulation

(including those we commemorate today) and who have been gathered from all nations and tribes and peoples and languages (and generations), with the Lamb in the midst of throne as Your Good Shepherd.

Now, if that divine beatitude awaits you in the New Jerusalem, then you can live earthly life equipped with the gifts of the Spirit that carry you, as the hymn says, in hope that draws nigh to Christ and trusts in Him, our Lord. And that hope and trust and confidence and certainty in Christ is instructed and upheld and aided by the Word of Him to whom they draw nigh. Isn't that how that hymn said it: "To all who trust in Him, our Lord will aid and counsel now afford." Your Lord will not only grant you the inheritance of the earth in the life of the world to come, but aid and counsel for this life.

And that's exactly where the Beatitudes turn their attention: teaching us to be merciful, to be pure in heart, to be peacemakers, to bear with persecution. These *are* the crosses to bear for Christians this side of heaven. And they can only be borne with the wisdom, aid and counsel of God; they can only be borne by the grace of God in Christ Jesus that is known through faith that we are children of God, no matter the appearance, no matter the current affliction.

How often do we hear in the Scriptures that we are to bear with these things, for "the present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed to us," (Paul assures the

Romans). And, if that is our lot for this life – to be merciful in a world that champions “survival of the fittest,” to be pure in heart among: the proud at heart, the greedy at heart, the insidious at heart, the lustful at heart; to be peacemakers that confess God’s kingdom to and among the warring and raging and tottering kingdoms; to be persecuted at the hands of all of these – for the world does not know Him, therefore it will not know us. It hates Christ, therefore it hates us. It rejects Christ, therefore it rejects those who hope in Him.

Nevertheless, (as our Collect of the Day petitions God) we pray that God grant us “all virtuous and godly living” that eagerly anticipates coming “to the unspeakable joys.”

In other words, rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great... and it is safeguarded... in heaven. Safeguarded by Jesus Christ, He who bears you in the nail-pierced palms of his hands and knows you by name and will preserve you in that baptismally-robed host of heaven that is before the throne of God both day and night, that we might forever and ever see him as he is, when our inheritance comes to pass in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.

In the Name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Holy Spirit.
 + AMEN +

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