

The Feast of All Saints, A✠D 2010

Matthew 5:1-12

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

1 Blessed are the rich in goods, for they are kings today. Blessed are you who enjoy each day, because you never know when death will strike. Blessed are you who are powerful, for you will leave a big inheritance. Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for immediate gratification of what your flesh desires, for you will be satisfied for now. Blessed are the vengeful, for they will get what's rightfully theirs. Blessed are the warm in heart, for they will see friends. Blessed are the comfortable, for they shall avoid stresses. Blessed are those who avoid persecution by going-with-the-flow, for who needs the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revere you and imitate you and utter all kinds of good about you falsely on account of your carefully guarded façade. Blessed are the popular, for theirs is a desirable place in life. Blessed are you when people forget God's law and let you do whatever pleases you most. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is today.

2 How you get it matters little, as long as you receive your reward for today. Because tomorrow may never come. If you buy in to the American beatitudes, your reward will be for today, and today alone. These temporary rewards cannot change the trajectory of any life: toward death. Rich and poor, respected and hated, popular and detestable, influential and powerless, hedonists and ascetics, carpe-diets and atheists: no matter who you are, you will die. Give up your false hopes and your living for the moment. Stop pretending that you may have years, or weeks, or days, or hours left to repent of your sinfulness. Repent now.

3 There is a stark difference between popular ideas of the power of positive thinking, even under the costume of Christianity and genuine Christianity, as revealed in the Beatitudes. In fact, the beatitudes will burst your bubble of positive thinking. If happiness is what you're after, you won't find it in the beatitudes. Instead, blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful, those who are pure in heart, those who are peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and blessed are those who are reviled and persecuted, who have all kinds of evil spoken against them simply for being Christians. How's your positive thinking now?

4 The beatitudes are downright depressing if you're looking for happiness. In fact, life itself is pretty depressing, if you're looking for happiness. Especially today. Today, All Saints' Day, we recall the lives of those who have preceded us in the life of faith and in death. We think of faithful grandparents and parents who taught us to cherish the faith delivered to us in Holy Baptism. We remember faithful pastors who instructed us in the faith by calling us to repentance and absolving us with the very forgiveness of God, who catechized us toward the Lord's Supper. We remember brothers and sisters whose death strikes closer to home. And we consider our own mortality. No amount of happiness—genuine or contrived—the product of possessions or positive thinking—will last beyond death, it seems. And, when faced with the cold reality of the death of a loved one, our happiness is shattered.

5 But this isn't the Spanish el Dia de los Muertos. It's not the day for all the dead, only for the saints, those who died with faith. Having retained the Lord's gift of faith until death, they're on the other side of the beatitudes. Now, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now they are comforted. Now, they have inherited earth and heaven. Now, they are satisfied. Now they receive mercy. Now, they see God. Now they receive their great reward. Even while they wait with Christ for the day of His return, the day when He will raise their dead bodies and reunite them with their souls, even now, they have these blessings. Their strife, their suffering, their struggles are over. St. John summarized the Beatitudes in his Revelation: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them." But for you, these things are not yet. And so, the Beatitudes are for you a description of life of saints still alive. They remind you of what you hope for: not temporal happiness but eternal joy.

6 Why can you hope for such joy? Why in the midst of a dying world can you have hope of eternal life? Why, when you see the evidence that your body is getting older, sicker, weaker, and closer to death, can you have confidence that your very body will rise to everlasting life and blessedness? Don't go beyond the Beatitudes. The Preacher of the Beatitudes, Jesus Christ, was all of these things in your place: poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsting for righteousness, persecuted.

7 From this mount, where He preached, the Lord was journeying toward another mount, the Mount of Calvary. There, He who was perfect Righteousness, the Son of God in flesh, hungered and thirsted for righteousness as the greatest sinner the world has ever known. He took your sin as His own. And there, on the mount of Calvary, He died, condemned for your sin, for the sin of every saint we remember today, and every saint we've forgotten. He died a death you will never have to die. He died rejected by God. He suffered the wrath of hell on the cross. Because He died this death, you will never die it.

8 Yes, you will die the little death, the one that will cause all your family and friends to mourn their loss. But it will be no loss for you. And this little sleep of death lasts only for a moment until the return of the One whose sermon from Mt. Calvary was simply: "It is finished." Yes, beloved, your Lord who died and who rose from the dead is coming back for you. At the day of His return, He will reunite you with all those who have preceded you in faith and death.

9 But you needn't wait that long. Jesus comes today. He comes to His holy Altar with His very real Body and Blood. And, even at this Supper, you are reunited with those whose death you still grieve. Though your eyes cannot see them, your ears know better. What does the Holy Liturgy tell you? We build chancels in semi-circles for a reason; the circle is completed by those resting with Christ. Here, at the Lord's holy Altar, around the precious Body and Blood of Jesus, are angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, all the saints past and present. Here, in the meal that forgives your sins, you get a window into heaven, to the other side of the Beatitudes.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer