

The Feast of All Saints, A ✕ D 2009

Matthew 5:1-12 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Two pictures of the Church. St. John sees an innumerable multitude, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in hand, singing out, in unison and perfect harmony, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" The Church is without division, without conflict, without worry. She has no anxiety about the future; she does not speak wistfully about days past. They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shelters them with His presence. They no longer hunger nor thirst, for their hunger and thirst have been filled. These are the saints in heaven, the Church triumphant. Blessed are they.

2 And then there's the picture Jesus paints, of the Church militant, the saints on earth. And this is quite a different picture. They are poor in spirit; they have nothing to contribute, nothing to add to their salvation. They mourn; they have funerals and tombstones and anniversaries of deaths. They wonder what their Lord could have done to have prevented this or that death. They are meek, unable to assert their will or coerce anyone into their ranks. And they are hungry. And thirsty. Oh, do they hunger and thirst. They struggle against sin, seemingly to no avail. It's not that they seek it out

or plan to sin, but they still sin. They hate it, and they long for—hunger for—thirst for—righteousness. They are merciful and pure in heart. They make peace, often at the cost of their own lives, but they do make peace. And yet the world hates them, reviles them, makes up the most vicious lies about them, plots against them. They're different, refusing to give in to the world's wiles and pleasures, so they are persecuted. Their congregations are scattered all over the world, and whether tens or tens of thousands gather, it is but a tiny, tiny fraction of their number. Blessed are they. Blessed are you.

3 Blessed are you, even when you don't see any blessings. Blessed are you when you are poor in spirit, emptied out, feeling altogether helpless, because yours is the kingdom of heaven. All that emptiness is so your Lord can fill you with something better, with Himself. Blessed are you who mourn the death of loved ones in the faith, for you will be comforted, not with the kind of pseudo-comfort a Hallmark card delivers, but with the real comfort of their presence, raised from the dead. Blessed are you who are meek, who happily work for others with no reward; you will inherit the earth.

Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who loathe your sin, who know the bitter struggle against the world and your sinful flesh, and who long to taste relief. You will be filled with a righteousness from outside yourself. Blessed are you when people take advantage of your mercy, when people abuse your forgiveness, for you will be shown mercy. Blessed are you when you endure persecution, hatred, and violence from friends or coworkers or even family members on account of Jesus; the Name you bear is greater than the persecution you endure.

4 John saw what you cannot. He saw the fulfillment of what Jesus declared in the Beatitudes. He didn't just see the saints who had died up until he was on the island of Patmos. This isn't Dead Saints Day. This is All Saints' Day. John saw the whole Church, the entire company of saints, those departed before him, those departed after him, and those who never died because the Lord Jesus returned while they were still

alive. The song of the whole Church is this: Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! Trust your ears and not your eyes. What John tells you is real; what you see is passing away. Trust your ears and not your eyes; the Lord who preached the Beatitudes is He who speaks them into reality. John foretold your reality, and Jesus declared it. Blessed are you.

5 He is the Lamb to whom belongs salvation. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Beatitudes He preached. He is the most merciful, the purest in heart. He mourned for you, for all of humanity lost and condemned for its sinfulness. He was persecuted, beaten, abused, nailed to a cross to die. The world reviled Him, hated Him, falsely said all kinds of evil against Him. He came to be the peacemaker, to settle the conflict between God and mankind that was nearly as old as the world, to put an end to humanity's sinful rebellion against its creator, to bring the peace of sins forgiven. On the cross, when he died and gave up His spirit, there was no one poorer in spirit; at the moment of His death the kingdom of heaven was perfectly displayed.

6 All Saints' Day is your Easter, the guarantee of your resurrection. Though sorrow lasts for the night, joy comes in the morning. The night of weeping will come to an end. The Lord Jesus who died to forgive your sins rose on the Morning of the new Day, the eighth day of creation. St. John has seen the fulfillment of that day, all the saints of God raised in the flesh to live with their Lord eternally. The dead we remember today are with the Lord, awaiting His return, awaiting the Day of their resurrection. They rest from their labors now, and they will rise with the Lord then.

7 You will rise, too. Whether Jesus returns before you endure the little death or after, you will rise. Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death. We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ has been raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him in a death like His,

we will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. Your body will rise. The very body made a temple of the Holy Spirit when you were baptized, the very body that heard the Word of God, the very body that ate the Body of Jesus and drank His blood, your body will rise.

8 But you needn't wait until then to be reunited with loved ones who have departed before you, with apostles and prophets. The reality John saw already is, even if you can't see it.

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? 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. Believe your ears, not your eyes. The Lord's altar is the most crowded place on earth. Here, heaven and earth intersect as you eat the Body and drink the Blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

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

Soli Deo Gloria
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