

All Saints

GOSPEL

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Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

‘How happy are the poor in spirit;
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy the gentle:
they shall have the earth for their heritage.

Happy those who mourn:
they shall be comforted.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right:
they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown them.

Happy the pure in heart:
they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers:
they shall be called sons of God.

Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you
and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.’

(Matthew 5:1-12)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- All Saints’ Day remains a holy day of obligation in many countries.
- In some cultures, the visits of the faithful to the cemetery take place on this day, anticipating All Souls’ Day.
- In the Beatitudes, “how happy” (“blessed” in some translations of the Bible), translates to *Makarios* in Greek. This term is used as a declaration that person has either received a blessing from God (Mt. 16:17; Rom. 4:7) or can expect to receive His blessing in the future (James 1:12; Rev. 14:13; 22:14). The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount are of the latter type, which can be considered anticipatory or eschatological, for they announce that the blessings of the New Covenant will be fully realised in heaven. Some do promise blessings that are partly enjoyed in this life, but all of them look beyond the struggles and hardships of this life to the eternal blessedness of the life to come.

- Jerusalem is called the “heavenly city” because it is the biblical image of the Church brought to perfection: the communion of God with his people, where the saints live in his presence and praise him forever. In the Preface of All Saints, the Church calls this city our homeland and describes the saints as our brothers and sisters who have already reached their goal; we, still on our earthly pilgrimage, are encouraged by their example and prayers as we journey toward the same promised joy. Even if the readings at a particular Mass do not mention Jerusalem explicitly, the Preface draws together the meaning of the celebration: All Saints honours the whole company of the redeemed and points us toward the heavenly communion to which God calls us.
- The Beatific Vision is the fulfilment of the hope expressed in St John’s words: “we shall see him as he is.” Through the Father’s love, we are already his children, but the fullness of what this means is still to come: when Christ is revealed, we shall see God face to face and be made like him, sharing fully in his life and holiness. This is not simply seeing God from a distance, but entering into the perfect communion with him for which we were created. On the Solemnity of All Saints, we celebrate those who have reached this fulfilment and take heart that the same hope is offered to us; as St John teaches, it calls us to purify our lives in readiness for that encounter.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Matthew’s Beatitudes are most clearly understood as being about the spiritual attitudes and actions of the kingdom of heaven. The first Beatitude calls for humility, humbly acknowledging a need for God. The second is often translated as the ‘meek’ and echoes a similar sentiment. Motives of mourning in the third Beatitude are not to be drawn from the miseries of a life of poverty or subjection but rather from a deep sadness at the evils apparent in the world. The remaining Blessings are more active. They tell us how we should be and act in order to bring about the Messianic kingdom. People of faith must hunger for justice and be merciful; be pure of heart and act as peacemakers; be prepared to suffer at the hands of others for the sake of truth and righteousness.

- Think of times when you felt truly ‘blessed’. How did this make you feel? Reflect on how you responded to such blessing.
- Based on what you have read, what are the characteristics or qualities of a saint? Has this changed your perception of what makes a saint?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Discuss people you have met who embody the Beatitudes or who act in the way which Jesus outlines here.
- Who are some of the great people of history, especially the saints of the Church, who can be seen to have lived the Beatitudes? How have their lives mirrored the Beatitudes?
- Explore how the Kingdom of God is presented in the Scriptures.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

The Church developed the tradition of honouring martyrs, those who had faced death rather than recant their faith in Christ, very early in its history. As time went by this was extended to other holy men and women of faith who had left a legacy of witness to Christ. Today's great feast or Solemnity seems to have its origins in the Papacy of Gregory III (731–741), who built a chapel in the Basilica of St Peter dedicated to all the Saints and established a day of commemoration on November 1. Pope Gregory IV (827–844) extended the celebration on 1 November to the entire Church.

Today when we honour the Saints, we are effectively praising the grace of God which has triumphed in their lives. These are people whose lives have intensely and publicly reflected God's love in Christ. The saints are placed before the Christian community as public witnesses to, and concrete examples of, living the Christian vision. They act as a challenge to the Christian community to live up to the demands made by this public witness to faith in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

- Tell the stories of particular saints, highlighting that there are many different and legitimate ways that God's grace can be embodied. For example, St Thomas Aquinas is very different from St Maximilian Kolbe.
- You could explore the process of Canonisation which the modern Church employs.
- You could tell the story of Saint Mary MacKillop, Australia's first official saint.
- Emphasise that this feast of All Saints also honours those whose lives embody holiness but who may not be among the 'famous' or publicly recognised.
- The Solemn Blessing of All Saints may be given after Sunday Mass (RM, pg. 719)

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for connecting the Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment.

- Is your parish community or perhaps those nearby named for a particular saint? What virtues could catechumens identify and seek to emulate from these people?
- Use the open Scriptures as a focus for prayer. Pray for each other as you journey to wholeness and holiness. Sing together a version of The Beatitudes (GA 489 or 492). Conclude with the Blessing at No. 97C.

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