

All Saints Sunday  
Nov. 5, 2017  
Christ the King  
Kenner

***The Communion of Saints***

Text: Matthew 5:1-12

I'm often surprised that Jesus had any followers at all. Especially after reading again today's Gospel from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus spoke these words early in his ministry, they were some of the first words many listeners heard from him. Here's just a short smattering of Jesus' statements from the Sermon on the Mount.

"You have heard that it was said. . . 'You shall not murder.' But I say that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment. . . If you say 'you fool' you will be liable to the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21-22).

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (5:27-28).

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (5:38-39).

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5:43-44).

"If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6:14-15).

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (7:1-2).

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father" (7:21).

And there are a lot more. Mind you, these statements from our Lord aren't simply his advice for living, but his commands. Jesus means business.

And, again, I'm surprised that the crowds didn't simply walk away when they heard today's reading, the Beatitudes, in which Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . blessed are those who mourn, . . . blessed are the meek. . . those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. . . blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted. . . and blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

Wow! That's the Gospel for All Saints day. Do we have any takers? Any saints among us?

Yet as we read the sermon on the mount, in Matthew chapters 5-7 (read it in its entirety this week), there's something deep inside us which says "yes, that's the way life is meant to be. The beatitudes remind us of what it means to be fully human, really human, reflecting the image of God in us."

But we know that image is buried so deep, that we seldom get to see it. Because most of us live by a whole different set of beatitudes. "Blessed are the famous, the wealthy, the pushy, the well-liked, the popular, the lucky, the

powerful, the good-looking, etc." At least, that's what our culture tries to tell us.

"But don't believe it," Jesus tells us. Instead, he says, "pick up your cross and follow me." And that really scares us off. It's tough enough just being a Christian without trying to be a saint as well. Or so we think.

It's natural to make sainthood sound like an achievement. It's just normal to think that some Christians are better Christians than others, because they seem to have greater faith, show more love, have done more praiseworthy things, and are certainly better spiritual examples than the rest of us.

Again, it's natural to think that way. So some Christian groups have tried to distinguish the truly saintly by specifying how they qualify, by their really good works, including a verifiable miracle or two

But here's the surprising thing. Just like so many other gracious surprises in our Christian life, the amazing truth is that all of us who believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, are deemed saints, whether we know it or not.

Holiness is a gift. Not something we achieve. We are made holy in the cleansing water of baptism, we are reminded of our redeemed status when the cross is made over us during the absolution, and we are strengthened in our discipleship as we participate in the Holy Communion.

Every time we speak the Apostles Creed we say, "I believe in . . . the communion of saints."

So what exactly is the "communion of saints"? It is the fellowship (because that's what the word "communion" means), the fellowship of believers. It's the

definition of church. "I believe in the holy catholic church," (that's "catholic" with a small "c", meaning "universal") I believe in the holy catholic church," that is, "the fellowship of believers, the communion of saints."

All believers, all the faithful who ever were, who are either here or are already in heaven. Again, not because of what they or we have done, but because of what's been done for us by Christ. We are saints not because of our actions, but because of his active mercy towards us.

In the Old Testament we read how God heard the cries of the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt, how he sent Moses to lead them on an exodus out of Egypt, through the red sea to Mount Sinai. God had rescued them, redeemed them. How would they use their new freedom? How would they live?

So on Mt Sinai, God instructs Moses to tell the people, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." That's already an accomplished fact. Therefore, "you shall have no other gods before me, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet." This is the way the God who has already saved you now wants you to live as his redeemed people.

Something similar is spoken to us in the Sermon on the Mount. Knowing that we have already been redeemed by Christ, who gave his life to assure us of life everlasting, Jesus tells us, "here's how I want you to live now as my saints." We do a lousy job of it, of course. But the Holy Spirit is still determined to have his way with us by reminding us of who we are, saints, because of Christ.

