

## Feast of All Saints (observed 11/7/10 – *Blessed Saints ... in Heaven and on Earth*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

It seems to be imprinted on our DNA, so to speak – the attitude that only those who live a visibly better, purer, more spiritual ... more saintly ... life are to be called “saints.” If we say of someone, “She is a saintly woman” or “He was a saintly man,” we mean by our words that they have led visibly holy lives. Many thought the Pharisees were “saintly” – the pinnacle of a virtuous Jewish religious life. The Pharisees thought so, too. However, as we heard a couple of Sundays ago, it was the penitent Tax Collector who went home from the Temple justified, rather than the Pharisee [LK 18.9-17]. Now and again, the media will hold before us a supposedly “saintly” person – though they generally do not use that term. And some churches have developed an intricate set of criteria for determining sainthood. These criteria include a life-testimony of “heroic virtues” – something akin to fulfilling the *Beatitudes* we just heard – as well as at least two miracles (one even **after** death)!

Whether or not we have any background in such a church, we all tend to think in like terms (more or less). A saint must be someone a cut above the rest – certainly better than most of us. This wrong thinking about saintliness manifests itself in the church also this way: it is those who serve in the church who are really holy ... really saintly. And, contrariwise, if you do not serve in the church at least in some capacity – well, you just are not the Christian you could be ... you are not as saintly as those who do.

Even if we do not feel that we are up to it, such “sainthood” is nevertheless our goal. We strive for it – on our better days ... and in our better moments. When we hear the *Beatitudes* in the proper frame of mind, we wish to live that blessed life of being poor in spirit [MT 5.3], mourning [5.4], meekness [5.5], hungering and thirsting for righteousness [5.6], showing mercy [5.7], exercising purity in heart [5.8], and peacemaking [5.9]. On our very best days, we may be resolute to endure reviling and persecution for the sake of Christ. And when we happen to be in a very good mood – a strong-in-the-faith mood – we may even be able to **rejoice and be glad** in the midst of trials and tribulations ... as we look forward to

our heavenly abode and our deliverance from this valley of tears that lies in the grip of evil and under the pall of death.

So we hear the *Beatitudes* and ask our ourselves – wonder to ourselves: “Have I fulfilled them? Have I lived the virtuous, saintly life Christ our Lord portrays in this portion of His *Sermon on the Mount*? Have I at least done well enough in one or more of the categories – at least better than most – to insure that I will be comforted, inherit the earth, be satisfied, receive mercy, see God, be called a son (or a daughter ... a child) of God, and receive the Kingdom of heaven? How will the God Who sits on the throne of heaven judge me?”

When we are honest with ourselves – if we evaluate ourselves not against others but simply based on God’s commands and demands of us in His Holy Word – we have to say: “I am no saint. I tend to be self-righteous, not poor in spirit. I would rather not mourn – at all ... for any reason. I am more uncompromising than meek. I want a lot of things in life ... out of life – but righteousness is not on my top ten list right now. Mercy ... I like to receive it – but what about giving out what is just and fair to the other guy? Purity in heart is good – but it is impossible to be pure all the time. Peacemaking is nice – so long as I do not have to take too much grief or give up too much in the process. And I really don’t like persecution – when it’s coming my way, I’d rather get out of the way ... and hide away.”

“How will God judge me? How can God possibly call me blessed? How will He ever number **me** with the saints in heaven? I know what I am. I am a sinner ... no saint!”

But that is where you are wrong, dear saints of our Lord! You **are** saints – holy ones in the Lord – already now ... here on earth. And the *Beatitudes* are not a set of new commandments that you have to live up to, but a declaration of the blessed reality of those who are in Christ – already now on earth ... and more perfectly forever in heaven. Notice carefully just how our Savior structures His words. He does **not** say: “**If** you are poor in spirit, etc., **then** yours will be the kingdom of heaven.” Rather, He makes the declaration: *Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are those who mourn*

*... Blessed are the meek ... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ... Blessed are the merciful ... Blessed are the pure in heart ... Blessed are the peacemakers ... Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake ... Blessed are you!* That is **your** reality even now – though you still carry around the sinful flesh ... and fall to temptations!

How can you be sure of that? How can I declare so boldly that you are saints already now? First, because that is what Jesus says. These are not conditionals. They are declarations of realities ... and their blessed results. This is Christ's Word, not my own. Second, because of what the Apostle and Evangelist, St. John, says in his first Epistle: *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. ... Beloved, we are God's children now.* [1JN 3.1, 2] To unpack the original sense a bit: *Behold, what kind of love the Father has given (and continues to give) to us! The purpose of His love toward us is that we might be called – indeed be – God's children. And that is the enduring result of His love: we are God's children ... already here and now ... and forever in heaven!* And if we are God's children – **since** we are God's children by grace through faith – already here and now, then we are surely also those blessed ones about whom Christ our Lord speaks. For the beloved children of God are always blessed – since we have Christ as our Brother and Lord and God.

As to how we will be judged – whether we are saintly now in the sight of God – remember that Christ is the **Lamb** Who sits on the Throne of God in heaven. He Who judges us is both God **and** Lamb. He is not just righteous Judge, but that righteous Judge Who **Himself** has paid the price for all our sins by shedding His holy, innocent Blood upon the Cross. The One Who judges us is also the One Who has made us His saints – His holy ones – by virtue of His very Own pure and holy life in our stead and for our eternal salvation. And what does our First Reading say about the One Who sits on the throne? *He Who sits on the throne will shelter them with His Presence* [REV 7.15]. Or, to put it another way – as the same Reading from REVELATION says: *These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the*

## **Lamb** [7.14]

The Lamb of God Who has taken away the sins of the world [JN 1.29] shelters us with His Presence not in some general way, but by making Himself our very robe ... and skin ... and shelter. And blessed ones – saints – is who we are **in Christ**. We are made the blessed poor in spirit by Him Who made Himself poor that we in Him might be rich [2COR 8.9]. We are taught to mourn our sin by Him Who mourned over Jerusalem and the death caused by mankind's sin [LK 13.34; JN 11.35]. We are the blessed meek because Christ the Lamb was Himself meek and lowly in heart, humbling Himself unto the death of the Cross that you might be His saints [MT 11.29; PHI 2.8]. We are the blessed ones whose hunger and thirst for righteousness has been satisfied with the righteousness of Christ accounted to us by grace. We are the blessed ones who have been taught mercy by the One Who is Mercy incarnate ... by the One Who has shown us mercy. We are the blessed pure in heart; for the Pure One has purified – cleansed – our hearts when He washed us in His Blood as we were buried into His death and raised to new life in Holy Baptism [ROM 6]. Clothed in Christ and His pure holiness, we are able to *draw near* to the throne of God *with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water* [HEB 10.22]. We are the blessed peacemakers, since Christ's death on the Cross made for peace between God and men.

When St. John says: *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared* [1JN 3.2], he is giving voice to the fact that as children of God we live in the already / not-yet. We are **already** the children of God – but we do **not yet** understand or see the fullness of that reality. {Example – A child born to a Buffet/Gates/Murdoch is a billionaire already ... does not understand ... or look like it ... but still true.} We are blessed saints – holy ones – of God **already** on earth – but we do **not yet** see that holiness/saintliness shining forth as a pure reflection of the Lamb Who sits upon the throne. *But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him* – perfectly blessed saints ... all the days of our lives ... in heaven.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]