

Feast of All Saints [observed] (11/06/11 – *True Blessedness in Being God’s Saints*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Today we are observing the *Feast of All Saints* – which falls on November 1 each year. Last Sunday we observed the *Festival of the Reformation* a day early. It was on the eve of *All Saints* – October 31, 1517 – that Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the church door in Wittenberg. And there is a connection between the two – and between the point of the Reformation and the *Holy Gospel* appointed for *All Saints*. Unfortunately, many did not get the point in Luther’s day – just as they did not get it during Jesus’ ministry on earth ... just as they do not get it today. But, Lord willing, we shall get it – as we hear the Word of our gracious God proclaimed into our ears and hearts this day.

Jesus begins His preaching of His *Sermon on the Mount* to the disciples in a curious way. Nine times Jesus says emphatically: *Blessed*. It is the first word – just as we have it in our English. *Blessed the poor in spirit ... Blessed those who are mourning ... Blessed the meek ... Blessed those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness ... Blessed the merciful ... Blessed the pure in heart ... Blessed the peacemakers ... Blessed those who have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake ... Blessed are you [all]* [MT 5.3-11]!

That, dear Christians, **is** your reality – here and now. And that **will be** your reality – forever in heaven.

It does not always seem that way ... to be sure. There is suffering here. You suffer. There is poverty here. Many of you struggle making ends meet. And there are believers worse off than we are. Some of you long for comfort in your mourning – but it seems so long in coming. There is so much to mourn. You may be meek – but you only seem to be run over because of it. Sometimes we show mercy – but are reviled in return. Still others would take unfair advantage of your merciful nature. We are not always pure in heart – but even when ... by God’s grace ... we are (pure in heart, that is), we still do not get to see Him ... yet. We try to make peace between warring family members ... sparring co-workers ... spitting friends – but no one calls us “sons/children of God” because of it. In fact, they may become angry with **us** and call us “meddlers” instead – or worse. We may feel persecuted at times –

but it is usually for reasons quite apart from anything that has to do with righteousness. Often, persecution comes to us because of our **own** sins.

Apart from our own **lack** of living up to this characterization of our Christian faith and lives, our main difficulty with this part of our Lord's *Sermon on the Mount* is that we simply do not believe it to be true. Jesus describes – indeed, declares – a status regarding His disciples ... His believers ... His saints. We **ARE *Blessed***. That is our status. But we certainly do not always feel like it. Indeed, we **seldom** feel like it. We doubt it. As a result, we doubt **God** because He has declared us so. Despite the example of the martyrs of old – that faithful cloud of witnesses ... many of whom were persecuted unto death for their faith in Christ and their public witness of that faith – we too often fail to see **our** faith as strong ... as unwavering ... as bold and relentless. A little persecution and we deny our Lord with our deeds – even if not in words. A little persecution and we begin to wonder where God is ... if He truly cares for us and loves us as He claims ... if He is even there at all.

The world's cry of doubt regarding God in major disasters is our own when trial and tribulation enter our lives. “Where is God?” “Why did He allow this to happen?” “Why did He not prevent this, if He is truly almighty and all-loving?!” The world says it – and we deride them for their lack of faith. But we do the same thing ... in difficulties much less significant. Too often, we fail to see beyond what our mere, earth-bound, temporal senses can detect.

However, our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to see a much greater reality – one that is spiritual, heavenly, and eternal. It is a reality rooted in Him – Who **is** eternal and unchanging. It is a reality that is as sure and certain for us, as it is for those who have gone ahead of us in the faith. It is a reality that our gracious God has laid out before us – even though we cannot yet fully understand it, this side of heaven ... despite the heavenly vision given to St. John, which we heard in our *First Lesson*.

And this is our reality – our blessed reality. We are the ***poor in spirit***. The Holy Spirit has caused us to recognize our own lack of proper spirituality. He has made us to see that we are ***poor, miserable sinners***. Later in MATTHEW, when John the Baptist asks Jesus if He is the promised Messiah, our Lord

responds: *The poor have the Gospel preached to them* [MT 11.5]. The poor who are blessed and who receive the Kingdom of Heaven are those who need the Gospel. That is all of us!

This later Word from our Savior is a reference to a much longer promise given through the Prophet Isaiah. *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring Good News to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.* [ISA 61.1-2] In Jesus we have the living and breathing Gospel. And that is Good News for all of us who are, by conception and birth, spiritually impoverished. Jesus – and He alone – binds up our broken hearts ... liberates us from our captivity to sin and its evil father ... sets us free from the prison of death and hell ... and comforts our mourning and lamentation over our sins.

Jesus declares that you are *blessed*. Consequently, yours also is the Kingdom of Heaven, holy comfort, an everlasting inheritance, true satisfaction, abundant mercy, the eternal reward of the beatific vision of God, and a place in the heavenly mansions of the Father as His beloved children. And this is yours – not by your own might or merit ... but by grace through faith in Christ alone!

Look to Christ for salvation ... to Him Who made Himself poor for your sake, having left His heavenly Kingdom to give you the riches of His grace. Look to Christ, Who mourned our sinful condition and the separation it caused between us and God ... between us and others. Though He was not comforted on earth – indeed, suffered a most cruel death for your sake – yet *for the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God* [HEB 12.2].

Christ your Savior made Himself lowly for your sake. He allowed Himself to be treated as the least among men, though He is God and Lord. In mercy, the Son of God hungered and thirsted to bring you **His** righteousness. He has satisfied the righteousness of God by His holy life, death, and resurrection.

In mercy, Christ has shown us His mercy – though He Himself received only

our unjust indignation and the holy wrath of the Father against **our** sin. He Who alone is pure in heart – being the icon of the Father ... Who always sees the Father in the fullness of His glory – let His heart be pierced by sinful men. And in His Own flesh, Christ has made Himself the Peacemaker – ***making peace*** between God and mankind ***by the blood of His Cross***. [COL 1.20]

Jesus Christ is the One Who was persecuted because of His perfect righteousness. Indeed, the Kingdom of Heaven is His – by divine right. Yet in His merciful love, He gives it to you – already here on earth by faith ... then in heaven by sight. Because Christ allowed Himself to be insulted, persecuted, and evilly spoken against, you may ***Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven*** [MT 5.12].

Christ has made Himself our Brother in all things – ***that in HIM we should be called children of God*** [1JN 3.1]. And that title and declaration come from God Himself. **You ARE** His beloved children ... in whom He is well-pleased on account of Christ your Brother. And when Christ appears in great glory on the clouds, you ***shall be like Him*** ... and ***shall see Him as He is*** [1JN 3.2]. You shall see God – just as Christ has promised [MT 5.8]; for by your God-given, certain hope in Christ, you have been purified, as Christ is pure [1JN 3.3].

By the work of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, we have been made to see the poverty of our own spirits. We have been taught to mourn our sin. We are brought to humble meekness ... on our knees ... before God. Seeing our sinful condition, we hunger and thirst for that righteousness that is outside of us – ***apart from the works of the Law*** as we heard last Sunday [ROM 3.21] – the righteousness of God that is accounted to us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. In Holy Baptism, God the Holy Spirit has sealed you as His Own. You are numbered with the ***great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*** ... to stand ***before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in the white robes*** of Christ's righteousness, ***crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*** [REV 7.9-10] You are God's saints – God's holy ones – in Christ ... both now and forever!

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