

Dear saints in Christ, blessings of grace and peace to you as we remember all the saints of God.

The familiar words of the Beatitudes are a mandate for Christians...our marching orders as Christians. They are not the wisdom of the world, but the wisdom of Christ...They are not prescriptions for getting ahead, for winning friends and influencing people. In fact, sensible people might consider these blessings ambiguous or crazy.

Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit". We have probably each experienced one of these blessed saints. I think of a woman in her late 60's. Her life was simple and pure and gracious. Wherever she went, she took a small piece of God's kingdom to others, and God's spirit was in her. Many knew her in the congregation, yet her name was seldom mentioned, because she never drew attention to herself. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." She was blessed.

Jesus says "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." I think of Jean, who lost her daughter to cancer. She refused to let anger or fear or doubt get the best of her. She pitched in with her son-in-law to make sure that her baby granddaughter did not lack love or attention. She searched the scriptures, took classes, immersed herself in worship and prayer and fellowship. She volunteered many hours to brighten the days of people at our congregation and in the nursing home. And in the middle of all this searching, she found peace and comfort and love---even as her heart felt like it would break. Jesus blessed her, even as she mourned.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." I think of Ervin, who I knew as a child. He was a Norwegian bachelor farmer, who lived with his mother until she died when he was about 60. He loved people, especially children, but that's not what distinguished him as a saint to remember. One thing I noticed about him was that he never spoke ill of anyone. There was one family who came to church every Sunday, but they were disliked by almost everyone; barely tolerated because they were difficult people, hostile, often rude, very opinionated. But in them (as in others over the years), Ervin saw the image of God. He saw the face of Christ in their woundedness of spirit, in their search for wholeness and acceptance. He was not only kind to them, he went out of his way to let them know that God's grace and love were for them. Pure in heart, Ervin was blessed to see God in ways that the rest of us could not.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God". I remember an elderly couple who impressed me as a young pastor. At the time, I would have called them neurotic, because they couldn't seem to tolerate any kind of dissension or stress in the congregation. They would do anything within their power to try to bring people together and

shake hands and be reconciled. They were a blessing to their pastor and congregation, and to the Lord. These two were anxious and uptight saints who God used in a special way. Jesus is glad to call them God's children, even though they lived to a great age. They learned their lessons well.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. These people I call to mind today, each of them, have hungered and thirsted for righteousness, and each in their own way were filled---filled with the power of God to bring the kingdom to earth, here and now, in some special way. This is the desire within the soul that creates saints: the desire, the passion, the hunger and thirst for righteousness.

So often we think of righteousness as outside of us: it is justice in human relations, enforcement of laws, care for the environment, the end of war and bigotry and hatred so there is peace between nations. All of these are important. But the Beatitudes are not about nations, societies, and cultures or legal systems. They are for individual people. Right in the middle of his job description and blessing for saints, Jesus makes this statement about righteousness....he is talking about righteous individuals. There can be no such thing as a righteous country if the people within it are unrighteous.

The power that has enabled men and women to become saints of God is the hunger and thirst for righteousness within, a righteousness which comes from God. As we feel the hunger, the emptiness that this world leaves us with----then we turn to God for what the world cannot give, and we are blessed, filled with an abundance of grace. That's how saints are made.

We remember these saints today. Some of them are famous, some are known only to a few. And most of the saints we celebrate today have been completely forgotten by this world, but are even now blessed by God. Most of the saints who have been marked with the cross of Christ are quite ordinary. They attend worship and try to live a Christian life. They witness in their own unique way to the gospel and in some small way make the kingdom come into this world. But these folks can be easily forgotten. In a collection of meditations, Father Gerard Sloyan says, "Their faces and mannerisms...will one day require great effort to recall in imagination. That is an awful realization; my mother has been dead 12 years, and I can still recall her face clearly, but only in certain situations and moods. I can recall some of the things she said, but each year the number of her wise observations lessens in my memory. It's sad, but this wonderful woman who was never overcome by circumstances for 10 minutes in her life, has now been reduced to the humiliating state of the 'faithful departed'."

Yes, Father Sloyan, it is sad how quickly this world (and even the church on earth) will forget many of the 'ordinary' saints. But they do live on in God's presence, and will never be forgotten by their Creator and Redeemer. Today we celebrate ALL of them, and we share in one communion with them all across this earth and in heaven at the Lord's table. Together we praise God who calls us to righteousness, purity of heart, and unity of spirit. We live together in that love from which nothing in all creation can separate us. As we sang a few moments ago:

"O blest communion, fellowship divine!

We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;

Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.

Alleluia!"

+The peace of God...keep us one with all the saints in Christ Jesus. Amen.