

**All Saints Day
Gospel**

A sermon preached by the Rev. Adrien Dawson, November 4, 2007

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

We are All Blessed and we are All Saints

Today we are going to baptize Dimitri Bordone and Daniel Meekins, welcoming two more people to the community of saints in God's kingdom. Usually, when we think of saints, we imagine people who lived long ago. They lived perfect or difficult lives of faithfulness and are depicted today with halos around their heads. This church is named after a man named Mark who became a saint after he wrote down the earliest of the four Gospels in the New Testament. The legend is that the apostle Peter told Mark about his experience of following Jesus and Mark wrote it all down. We have a great image of this in one of our stained glass windows.

In our tradition, saints are not just the super human people who write gospels, miraculously heal the sick, or have visions of the Virgin Mary. Saints are simply people who faithfully attempt to live a Christian life, just like you and me. Saints are people who live by the promises we are about to make on behalf of Dimitri and Daniel. No one is going to do it perfectly, not even the saints who wear halos are without fault. What matters is that we are faithful, turning and returning to Christ again and again no matter which direction our life takes us.

In our Gospel reading for today Jesus is being followed by crowds from all around the Mediterranean. His fame has spread from Syria to Judea and beyond the Jordan River. People are especially interested in his ability to heal. Matthew tells us, "they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them." Crowds of people are flocking to Jesus and most of them have been living cursed lives of illness and disease. Jesus looks at the crowds gathered and then he ascends a mountain with his disciples. My hunch is that his disciples were looking distressed by the sheer number of sick people who were hoping for healing from Jesus. It must have been overwhelming.

In our human estimation of whether a life is blessed or cursed, we often equate illness, poverty, oppression, and loss with an abandonment of God's blessings. We see people afflicted and living in pain or desperation and we wonder what they have done to receive these curses. In our scientific age of medicine we no longer believe that disease is a punishment for sins committed by a person or their parent. But even with our enlightened perspective, we still accuse the victims of poverty and illness of not doing enough to care for themselves or take preventative measures for their health. So, Jesus takes his disciples up the mountain to teach them where God's presence and blessing really reside.

For many years, I heard these beatitudes from Matthew's and Luke's gospels and I thought that Jesus was prescribing a life of misery in order to receive God's blessings. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, you must be persecuted and poor in spirit. In order to be comforted, you must

be mourning. In order to inherit the earth, you must be meek. But Jesus never prescribes a life of pain, he knows personally that it is not difficult to find yourself in a place of suffering. What I misunderstood all those years is that Jesus is proclaiming the blessedness of *all* people; especially those that the world believes are cursed. Jesus is telling his disciples and us that the crowds who are harassed and suffering with illness and poverty and persecution have not been abandoned by God, in fact they are blessed by God's presence here and now. So, don't pity them and don't run from them. If you, too, would like to be in the presence of God, join them and minister to their needs. God's blessing is not waiting to be bestowed on us, sometime in the future. God is present with us now in the midst of the curses of this world and calling us to minister to one another.

This is the path to sainthood. Ministering to one another is the way we live into our baptismal promises. When we join with those in need, we grow into the full stature of Christ and become saints. Dimitri and Daniel may be small, but they have a ministry. Their call is to teach their parents and siblings and all of us how to love them with abandon. These two little boys ask all of us to let down our guard, lose our adult reserve, and become vulnerable to the love of a small child. That is their God given ministry as the newest saints in the community. These babies, and all babies, teach us to be better Christians when we give ourselves over to the ministry of caring for them. When we feel the overwhelming love of a parent for a child, we get a small taste of the amazing love that God, our mother/father in heaven, has for each of us.

In a few moments, the parents of Dimitri and Daniel, their god-parents, and all of us will make some very serious promises on their behalf. We will promise to teach them how to be Christians. This doesn't happen because we send Dimitri and Daniel off to Sunday School. They will learn to be Christians as they watch their parents, their god-parents, and all of the adults who are closest to them, who minister to their every need. They will see all of us pray and live the faith that we believe. Dimitri and Daniel will learn to be Christians because they are surrounded by saints who show them how to love God, how to love their neighbor, and how to minister to the world. In a moment, the saints in Dimitri and Daniel's lives will promise to turn away from all evil and turn towards Christ. In a moment we will all promise to support them, to be the great cloud of witnesses that helps them turn and return to focus on Christ in their lives. No one is able to be a Christian in isolation. We need the saints all around us. This is why we remember the saints who have gone before us, the saints in our midst, and the saints that are being born into our lives every day.

As we all renew our baptismal covenant, I invite you to ask God to make you a saint in the world. This does not mean you become super human and holier than the rest of the world. This does mean that you live out your baptism in the midst of the world. Everyday and everywhere, believe in the trinity of God made known to us as our creator, our redeemer, and our sanctifier. Gather with the community of saints in the church to reflect on scripture and break bread together. Keep returning to Christ, every time you discover that you have wandered away. Show the world that the good news, the Gospel, is present among us because you love your neighbor, you work for justice and peace, you treat everyone with dignity and see Christ in the face of every human being. When we live into our baptismal covenant, not only does our own faith develop and deepen, but our life becomes a support and an example to everyone around us, especially these little ones. Today we are all challenged to be saints so that Dimitri and Daniel and all the children of St. Mark's might learn how to be one, too.