

Feast of All Saints
Nov. 3, 2019
Saint James, Wheat Ridge

Today we celebrate
one of the most important days in the church year.
Today we celebrate All Saints Day.
On this day, we gather together to celebrate the lives
Of all the saints,
the men and women of faith,
who have lived before us.

Now some saints are really well known,
and get a lot of publicity.
Saint James, for instance.
He's one of the best-known saints, and for good reason.
He was one of the first disciples to follow Jesus,
One of our Lord's inner circle of friends,
And he was martyred for his faith.
We can be proud that our church is named for such a person.

But today we don't just celebrate those saints who are well-known,
Those saints who have churches named in their honor.
We have a whole thick book
Called *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints*.
It's nearly 800 pages long,
And there's a different saint on just about every other page.
But even a book this big can't contain all the saints.
One of reasons for a celebration of *all* the saints
is because we recognize that our ability
to identify exactly who the saints are...
is flawed.
There are a lot more saints out there
Than the church has officially recognized.

If you think about it,
you may be able to name some saints in your own life.
People whose lives were holy.
People who served God and served their neighbors.

People who somehow made some of Christ's light
 Visible in the darkness around them.
 Maybe you're thinking of a parent or a grandparent.
 Maybe you're thinking of a teacher, or a friend.
 The feast of All Saints helps us to remember
 That there have always been saints known to God alone.
 Probably a lot of saints who never thought of themselves as saints.

You might say that determining sainthood
 Has always been far from an exact science.
 So in the midst of wondering about just what it is that makes a saint,
 The church gives us our gospel reading for this morning.
 In this reading from Luke, Jesus talks about who the truly blessed ones are.

Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor,
 for yours is the kingdom of God."
 Got any poor people here this morning?
 Maybe not living in poverty,
 But who sometimes struggle to make ends meet?
 Who sometimes have to make difficult decisions
 About where to invest your limited resources?

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled."
 Anybody here ever struggle to fill a hunger within themselves?
 Maybe it's actual physical hunger
 Because you don't have access to enough good food.
 Or maybe it's a different kind of hunger.
 Maybe it's a hunger for companionship.
 Or a hunger for knowledge.
 Or a hunger for justice.
 It's an emptiness inside you that you can't seem to fill.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."
 Anybody here feel like crying sometimes?
 Crying for what you've lost?
 Or crying for the pain you see around you?
 Or crying in frustration or grief?

Those who are blessed by God, according to Jesus,
 are the poor, the hungry, and those who weep.

Well now, is it just possible
 That we've got a whole roomful of blessed saints
 Gathered here at Saint James this morning?

I think the reason the church has us read this gospel lesson
 on this day
 Is to remind us that saints are not just those
 Who have climbed the heights of moral splendor.
 Rather, saints are ALL those
 Who have opened their hearts to God by faith
 Here in the ordinary harshness of real life.

Saints are those who have been blessed by God.
 "Blessed are you," Jesus said,
 "when you find yourselves at the end of your rope.
 Because with less of you,
 There's more room for God and God's blessings."

You're blessed when you've lost it all,
 Because God's kingdom is there for the finding.
 You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry for something
 Because then you're ready for God's Heavenly banquet.
 You're blessed when the tears flow freely,
 Because joy comes with the morning.

But then, Jesus goes one step further,
 And it's a doozy of a step.
 He shares some truth about what it means to live into God's blessing.
 Love your enemies, he says.
 Let them bring out the *best* in you, not the worst.
 When someone gives you a hard time,
 Respond by praying for that person.
 No more tit-for-tat stuff,
 Or dare I say it,
 No more *quid pro quo*.
 Live generously.
 For here is the way to experience God's blessings:
 Ask yourself what you want people to do for you;
 then grab the initiative and do it for them!

To be blessed by God is to be opened to grace
 and to respond by living AS IF
 we were already living in the Kingdom.
 This is what saints do –
 and saints are you and you and you and you and all of us.

Now sometimes people say “Oh, that’s too hard.”
 And it’s true: being a saint IS too hard.
 That’s why Jesus told us we can’t become saints –
 or disciples – or people of faith
 All by ourselves.
 We have to open our hearts to God when we’re empty.
 We have to name our own sins when we miss the mark.
 We have to ask for forgiveness over and over again.
 And we have to trust that God is God
 And loves us with a love that never gives up.

And we also trust that the communion of saints
 Is praying for us.
 We don’t have to do it all.
 That great cloud of witnesses is praying for us
 And encouraging God to meet us where we need God the most.

I don’t pretend to rationally understand all of this.
 But I do find sweet peace in the promise
 That when I am at my wit’s end,
 There is still a loving company, gathered in heaven,
 Who stand at the throne of God,
 And they sing this song:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, god of power and might,
 Heaven and earth are full of your glory,
 Hosanna in the highest.
 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

The same Lord who has promised there will be a time
 when there will be no more poverty,
 no more hunger,
 no more sorrow.

For the Lord our god will be with us
to wipe away every tear from our eyes.

As the Apostle Paul wrote in the letter to the Ephesians,
Which we heard this morning,
Christ gives us each a spirit of wisdom and revelation
as we come to know him,
so that, with the eyes of our heart enlightened,
we will come to know the riches of the glorious inheritance
provided for the saint,
and the immeasurable greatness of his power
for those of us who believe.
Amen.