

November 1, 2020 Maricopa Lutheran Church All Saints Sunday
Revelation 7:9-17, Matthew 5:1-12

Today we celebrate believers of every time and every place, especially those who have died since the last All Saints Sunday. This is a day of contrast between the church and the world.

Who does the world remember with statues, plaques, and portraits? Military heroes, political leaders, scientists, pioneers in medicine, innovators, educators, and those who contributed so much to a culture through their writing, their music, and other forms of art.

However great their flaws, we remember them for personal qualities or achievements that made things much better, at least for those who admire them. Just maybe “the left hand of God” worked through some of these people in shaping human history, but we really don’t know about that kind of thing for sure

We may remember some of these famous people on All Saints Sunday; but for the most part, this day is for anonymous saints, for people who may be forgotten completely when their grandchildren die, if not before. This day is for people who don’t have a special place on the church calendar as Peter and Paul do, for example.

Today, we celebrate those many believers who teach others about Jesus, who forgive, and who do their best to be fair and just in their relationships. We celebrate people who try to make things better for others, whether through a food bank, a women’s shelter, or financial gifts. We especially celebrate those who suffered precisely because they were keeping the faith.

That’s the key: their faith and love were so inspired that they made sacrifices for their Lord and for other people, whether they did this quietly on a very personal scale or dramatically in the public eye. Very few of them have statues anywhere. That’s one reason why we read the Beatitudes today.

Whom did Jesus call blessed? The poor of spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for his sake. Willingly or unwillingly, these people were not as entangled with the things of this world. That's why this world takes advantage of them, holds them in contempt, or just doesn't want to be like them.

Now, imagine the reaction of those who first heard these words of Jesus, as they lived under a brutal Roman occupation. They painfully saw how the winners of this world are those with the power to get whatever they want. If the crowd didn't laugh out loud at Jesus, they probably still dismissed his words as sentimental nonsense. People who talk like Jesus may find their idealism hanging with them on a cross.

Now, if Jesus really knew more than the people who heard him, how do these words make sense? Today's First Lesson gives us one clue. It describes how God shall provide so well in the future for those who are faithful now. As Paul wrote in Romans 8, the sufferings of the present time aren't worth even comparing to the glory that shall be revealed to us.

Still, I think there's even more to it than that. However incompletely, God's kingdom is coming now and God's will is being done now, through people who love God and love other people even on the smallest scale.

That's what the Beatitudes describe. These people know both their need for God and how God generously provides for them. They sacrifice for God and for other people. They find their peace in loving God far more than they love the things of this world.

Today's First Lesson proclaims the hope we have in Jesus. Just as Good Friday was followed by Easter for our Savior, so also for us. Our crucified God works through the love that dares to suffer here and now. Finally, one way or another, our risen Lord shall bring a new heaven and new earth where the love of God makes all things new.

This is God's gift, not our achievement. God knows our faults and sins better than we do. Yet, he still offers us what we cannot earn. The grace that we receive changes us, with steps forward and backward and forward again, making us new through deeds of love for God and other people.

On All Saints Sunday, we especially remember those who showed some signs that the love of God was working in them. Through their love, we could see a reflection of God's love. Through their faith, we could get a sense of the Holy Spirit at work. Through their hope, we could see a vision of the new things that God would do.

If we knew these people well, we also saw their mistakes and sins. That just shows the greatness of God's mercy. It shows how God is changing sinners, even if Jesus still will have a lot of work to do on us when he comes again. It shows that we don't worship great people, but rather that we do worship a great God, a great God who can do wonderful things through very flawed people.

So today, we give thanks for how God has blessed us through the people that some of us know and fewer of us loved. Today, we look forward to the new heaven and new earth, where God shall provide abundantly and shall wipe away every tear.

Today, we can pray that God will inspire us to learn from those who went before us and to join them in following our crucified and risen Lord, who shall bless each and every one of his anonymous saints with everlasting life. Amen

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