

11.2.2025 All Saints Sunday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

“For yours is the kingdom of God”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

All Saints Day is the remembrance of all the faithful departed saints, the people of God who both believed in and acted upon Jesus’ words. The saints are ordinary people who reveal the extraordinary love of God in their lives. Each of you here today can think of people in your own life, who though no longer alive, live on in you through the faith they shared with you.

As Jesus says in today’s gospel, saints love their enemies and do good to those who hate them. They bless and pray for those who curse and mistreat them. They give to anyone who asks. Saints do to others as they would have others do to them.

All Saints Day is the remembrance of the Communion of Saints, which is the whole church gathered around Jesus Christ. The church is the Communion of Saints: it is all the faithful departed saints dwelling in the kingdom of God, and it is the church on earth, all of us, journeying by faith.

The stained-glass windows around the high altar with Christ at the center are a depiction in colorful glass of the Communion of Saints, the church in heaven and the church on earth. Those with halos represent the faithful departed who have received the glorious inheritance of the riches of Christ, and those at the bottom without halos represent us who are still on our human journey. One day, we too, will be counted among the faithful departed praising Christ in God’s eternal kingdom.

Paul writes of this in Ephesians, “*In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance... so that we... might live for the praise of his glory.*” To be on the journey of faith means living for Christ, living to glorify him. As Paul writes, in baptism, you “*were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people.*” Like the faithful departed saints, in baptism you were sealed with the Holy Spirit as heirs of the inheritance of Christ.

The church is also Christ’s body. As Paul writes, Christ is above all things, the head of the church, and we are his body, the fullness of Christ in this world. The church is quite literally hands to do Christ’s work, feet to carry his love, and the voice of his justice in this world. The church is the Communion of Saints, and it is the body of Christ in this world.

In the prayers today, we will remember all the saints of this congregation, St. Mark’s, who have died in the faith this past year and now share in the glorious inheritance of Christ. Each of these faithful departed saints were the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus during their lives.

All of us know and have known living saints, disciples of Jesus, who lived out Jesus’ words in today’s gospel – words that we both believe in and act upon. Jesus says, “*Whoever comes to me listens to my words and acts upon them*” (Lk. 6:47). In order for his love to be known in the world,

we must act upon his words.

The interesting thing about Luke's beatitudes, compared with Matthew's is that Luke's are not spiritualized. Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "*poor in spirit*," but is rather speaking of the economically poor – all whom the world would rather not see – all whom the world casts away onto the margins of society. In Luke, Jesus is addressing the very real concerns of daily life: the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the hated, and the excluded. These people, Jesus calls both "disciples" and "blessed."

In so naming them, Jesus is recalling Luke 4, when in the synagogue at Nazareth, he read from Isaiah 61:1-2, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and ...sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" Jesus is describing the cost of being a disciple and God's solidarity with the poor and weak.

These are uncomfortable words for many of us who are relatively speaking, well-off and well-fed, at ease and well-regarded in the world. The "woes" in today's gospel are challenging because they remind us that wealth and enough to eat are not meant to be ends in themselves. The peril of prosperity – and Jesus is recognizing it – is that prosperity can encase our hearts in a shell of self-sufficiency so that we are no longer sensitive to the needs of others and most of all, to our own spiritual poverty. Jesus, who is the head of the body, the church, calls the poor and the hungry "blessed" because he wants us his body, the church, to care about them.

Shortly before I was called to be your pastor, I briefly served a church in Evanston, Illinois that has a weekly Soup Kitchen just as we do. The homeless poor, the hungry and the outcast come to that Soup Kitchen every Sunday afternoon. One Sunday afternoon of Thanksgiving weekend, we served turkey and the trimmings to many, and I remember one woman in particular, named "Daisy," who was always soft-spoken and smiling. We spoke briefly that day, and later that night, Daisy was murdered while seeking shelter outside another church in that community just two blocks away. I mention Daisy because I remember her among the saints, the poor and the hungry that Jesus speaks of. I also remember Tom Carter, who I mentioned at the beginning of today's service. Tom was also homeless, ate at our Soup Kitchen, and helped in the kitchen. Tom was also murdered last Saturday, October 25. Like Daisy, Tom was a soft-spoken man who always seemed to radiate joy though he was poor and homeless. Jesus calls Daisy and Tom "blessed," and I know they are counted among the saints.

As I think about Jesus' words in today's gospel, I think of people like Daisy and Tom – people whom the world treats as invisible, pushing them, like it did to Jesus, out onto the margins of cities and communities. Jesus' words – "*Woe to you who are rich; woe to you who are full now; woe to*

*you who are laughing now; woe to you when all speak well of you*” – are hard for me to process because I am, like many, most certainly included in the “woes.” Paul calls the church the body of Christ, yet at times, I wonder if Christ himself would recognize his church in its wealth and social power. Please don’t misunderstand me, Jesus never – not once – condemned wealth outright; rather, Jesus cautions us about wealth because wealth can harden our hearts toward those less fortunate. Wealth can take the place of God in our lives.

Yet Jesus offers me hope – hope in the words, “*But I say to you who are listening, ‘Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. ...Give to everyone who asks of you...Do to others as you would have them do to you.’*” These words are hopeful to me because they offer each of us a way of living for others. For those of us who live with material abundance, food to eat, a place to live, and people concerned about us, Jesus is encouraging us to use what we have been given to help others in his name.

We live in a very prosperous society, yet we can still do more to love and help others. We can bless and pray for all people, and we can give from our abundance to help them.

If you have been given much, then do much for Christ and your neighbor.

Believe as if everything depends upon God and act as if everything depends upon you. Jesus is counting on you. Live as a saint – be his hands and the voice of his love in this world. Amen.