

Matthew 5:1-12

“I believe...in the communion of saints.” In the Apostles’ Creed we confess that within the visible church there are true saints, and that this is an article of faith, not of sight. We think we have a pretty good idea who God’s saints are in a given place. They’re the ones who act like saints, aren’t they? But do we know how a saint acts? Do we know how a saint is supposed to look? The problem is that we have among us no perfect role model. Even the most saintly among us have hearts full of sin and lives marked with imperfection. Someone can act like a saint one day, and the next he clearly shows that he is no saint.

The only true saint is Jesus. He is the Holy One of God. Everyone else is unholy. Yet among those who are unholy in how they live, there are true saints of God. *“I believe,”* we confess, *“in the communion of saints.”* It is not for us to try to identify God’s saints. We’ll know who are His saints in heaven one day. It is enough for us to know that when we gather for worship, we gather with saints of God. When we come up to receive the Sacrament, we commune with saints: those on earth and those in heaven.

Rather than asking who are the saints around us, the better question is, “Am I a saint?” To answer this question, we must close our eyes to how we have lived. No saint, including ourself, can be identified by sight; for with our eyes we see the works that are done, both good and bad. If we measure our saintliness by our good works, or by our evil works, we will never arrive at the truth; for saints are also sinners here on earth.

“Am I a saint?” is a question Jesus answers for us. He opens His mouth, says our text, and teaches: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* There are two words in the Greek for blessed. The one Jesus uses here denotes a state of bliss; fortunate, we could say; or even that congratulations are in order. The blessed ones are to be congratulated. They are fortunate. They are enjoying bliss.

“Well,” we think to ourselves, “that leaves me out. My life is hardly a life of bliss. How unfortunate for me.” But again with the eyes! To arrive at the truth, we must keep our eyes shut and open our ears to what Jesus says. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”* Our Lord here renders a statement of fact. The poor in spirit are God’s blessed ones, His saints, even if they don’t feel blessed.

As with blessed, there is also more than one word for poor in Greek. The one means that a person is so poor that he has to work to make a living. But the word Jesus uses here is a person so utterly poor, so destitute, that he has to beg. The poor in spirit, therefore, are those who are beggars before God; not just in regard to food, clothing, and so forth; beggars in spirit - having no goodness or righteousness of their own, but depending solely upon His mercy. A beggar has nothing of which he can give, but he is totally at the mercy of the one who gives to him. These are God’s saints, His blessed ones. They look to Him for everything in this life and in the life to come.

God’s saints, therefore, are not those who are full of themselves. Such a person has no need to beg. The poor in spirit, who are the saints, are those who must beg, not those who are able to work. Our good works count for nothing before God. They cannot move us one inch closer to heaven. They can only help our neighbor. A saint will be busily engaged in doing good works, but these are done because he is a saint, not to make him a saint. And even as he is performing such works of faith, his flesh, weak as it is, falls so easily into temptation.

Luther used the terms “state of being” for the saints in heaven, and “state of becoming” for the saints on earth. We, on earth, feebly struggle, while they, the saints in heaven, in glory shine. They have bliss now. They, who mourned here on earth, are comforted now. They have inherited the earth. They are satisfied now. Every one of Jesus’ beatitudes here in our text applies to them in the present tense. These future rewards are no longer in the future for them. But for us they are still in the future. We are not in the state of being; we are in the state of becoming. We are still growing in Christ. And our growth leaves much to be desired. We leave the Word of God unopened for days at a time, and our growth slows. We vacate the church pew and the Communion Table for weeks at a time, and our growth stagnates and dies. Our state of becoming is a struggle. The devil, the world, and our own flesh fights against our growth in Christ every step of the way.

But Jesus gives you comfort and hope here in His words today. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*” He says, “*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” You are not with Christ yet, but Christ is with you. You, friend, are God’s blessed one. You come here for His grace and blessings faithfully. You come to hear. You come to eat and drink. You come to receive. You do this because you are a beggar. You do not have an innocent life free from blemish. You do not have goodness in yourself which you can offer to God in exchange for a place in heaven. All you have is a sinful heart and life.

Do you believe this? Does this bring you here as a beggar before God? Then you are truly blessed. Jesus is yours, not just in the future, but now. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*” He says, “*for theirs... (not ‘will be’), but... theirs is (right now!) the kingdom of heaven.*” Even while you live here on earth, heaven is your possession because Jesus gives His kingdom to His poor beggars. He gives His kingdom, not through our words and works, but through His words and works. He works through Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, through His words of life, to give all who beg His kingdom of grace.

“*Thy kingdom come,*” is the prayer of God’s beggars. And that which Jesus teaches us to pray, He promises to give. But you won’t see it with your eyes... not now. A young woman, locked up behind bars in prison, and yet having open in her hands, the Word of the living God, is given the kingdom of heaven, although her eyes see only a hard, cold cell. An old man, living out his last days in pain and suffering, but whose head is still wet with the water of Baptism, and on his lips is the prayer, “*Thy kingdom come,*” is a beggar who is given the kingdom of heaven.

It doesn’t matter what your eyes see, or what your heart feels. Close your eyes and silence your heart. Jesus speaks the truth. “*Blessed are you...*” You have nothing, but Jesus gives everything...to you. You, dear sinful beggar, have a gracious God. He puts His word of forgiveness in your ears, and you are forgiven as He declares. No sin is held against you. Jesus took all your sins from you. He, the Holy One, died on the cross for you. He exchanged His holiness for your sinfulness. He put on the filthy rags of a beggar - our filthy rags; and He gives you, in your Baptism, the pure robe of His innocence. This is why, in Revelation, the Apostle John sees all the saints dressed in white robes. Christ covers them. He covers you. And this is why you, dear beggar, are God’s blessed one...His saint. Amen.