

Matthew 5:1-12

I do realize that I am jumping ahead a bit; seven weeks ahead actually. But still I want to bring Santa Claus into our conversation today as we observe All Saints Day in the church. Now as you may know, Santa Claus is our English rendering for St. Nicholas. Santa means saint. St. Claus we could say. Nicholas, of centuries ago, is revered by the church as a saint.

But what about our Santa Claus? The general opinion held by boys and girls, and even by their parents, is that Santa Claus is a saint because he brings toys, goodies, and much cheer to everyone. And that's all well and good. But compare, or contrast this, with yourself. Are you a saint? "Well, I'm no Santa Claus," you might say, "but who of us is?"

Those who are of the world, but not of the church, apply the word saint to people based solely upon their outward actions. You are considered to be a saint if you are kind to others, if you are helpful, and do works of charity. In the eyes of the world, what you believe has nothing to do with it.

Nowhere does this come out more clearly than at the eulogies of those who have died. "He was a saint," you often hear. Unless perhaps he was an ax murderer. It matters not what god he clung to when he was alive. Faith in the true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has nothing to do with being a saint in the eyes of the world.

Jesus, however, disagrees with the world...on pretty much everything, including saints. Who really are God's saints? "*Blessed*," He says, "*are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Heaven is reserved for God's saints. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" God's saints are His blessed ones; those who are clothed with white robes in John's vision in Revelation. And how do they get there? How do they become a part of that blessed multitude? Listen to what they cry. Not, "We did works of charity. That's why we are here. We were kind to others in our life." Oh no. But rather, "*Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb!*" they cry. Their robes are made white, we're told, not by washing them in their own good works, but by being washed in the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. This defines God's saints.

Now Santa Claus is a giver. And children are grateful that he is. And certainly God's saints are givers. But that does not make them saints. "*Blessed*," says Jesus, "*are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The word poor here in the Greek is a person who is so poor, so utterly destitute, that he has to beg. God's blessed ones, His saints, have hands that are not full, but empty. Beggars do not give, they receive.

The world, as it always does, has this backwards. To the world, saints are the givers, the doers. But Jesus tells us that His saints are the ones who are given to, who are acted upon.

Are you a saint? There were two people in church one day. One was there to give. He gave his offering to the Lord. He gave his time to work. He was a churchman. But he was no saint. The other person was in church to receive. He was there for pardon. He knew that his sins were great,

and this he confessed. He received forgiveness from the Lord. This man was a saint. We know these men better as the Pharisee and the Publican.

To be a saint, you have to be a sinner. Is this you? A sinner so miserable before the Holy God that you can only beg for mercy?

God's hands are not empty. Look at Jesus. His hands contain the marks of the nails which held Him to the cross. He died there for every sinner. And so He has pardon and peace to give to every sinner. He has these gifts for you.

You cannot mess this up. There is nothing you have to do to receive this. Jesus received you in your baptism. He placed into your empty hands the gifts He won for you on the cross. You don't have to earn them, or claim them by making some kind of decision. They're yours. Jesus does everything for you. Do you believe this? If yes, even your faith is His work and gift in you.

Even the tiniest child, yes, the smallest embryo can receive. The Word of God is so powerful that it is not limited by someone's age, or by their ability, or lack of it, to think.

To receive the kingdom of heaven, through the power in the Word, in Baptism, all that is necessary is that we be sinners; sinners who are nothing but beggars before God. The kingdom of heaven is yours, not if you act like a saint, but because God declares you to be His saint in Christ.

Live like a saint, therefore. Put to death the sinful desires within you. Yet do not doubt if you are God's saint because of the sins in your past. They are forgiven. This is what Jesus does for you. He forgives you. Not if you are a saint. He forgives you because you are a sinner. And therefore God calls you His saint, for you, too, are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

All Saints Day is that time in the church when we especially remember that great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. They were saints on earth. Now they are saints in heaven. And they are there not because the world saw them as saints, but because God did. He saw them always covered in the blood of the Lamb.

That same blood covers you, my friend. And this is why you are a part of that great and blessed multitude in John's vision. The kingdom of heaven is yours now in Christ. You are God's forgiven saint. Amen.