

Matthew 5:1-12

We are “middle-of-the-roaders.” We don’t like to take things to the extreme. “Everything in moderation,” is usually our motto. And this is true not only with regard to our daily living—it’s how we practice our religion. We’re moderate with our singing, with our giving, with our Bible reading. We don’t go to either extreme. We shoot for the middle of the road. That describes, also, the way we listen to the Word of God. We smooth off the rough edges so that it’s easier to accept. When we hear God’s Law in all of its harshness, we have the tendency to filter out what is severe. We practice “selective listening.” And the same holds true for the Gospel. When we hear all kinds of wonderful things said about us from the mouth of God, we know that He’s being rather “extreme.” We’re not really all that good. We’re not all that bad either—but we’re also not all that good. We’re pretty much “middle of the road.” We know we’re not saints, but we also know that we’re not the very wicked.

And if this is what we “know” about ourselves, we also know it to be true about others. The Church celebrates today as All Saints Day, but we know better. They weren’t really saints, in the full sense of the word. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then had her husband murdered. Peter denied his Lord. Paul persecuted Christians. Matthew was a thieving tax collector. Shall I go on? Not one of them, in the Old Testament or New, was really a saint. Even Martin Luther, who we remembered last week, was a pretty conceited, stubborn man, who lost his temper at times. Saint Luther? I don’t think so.

So when Jesus proclaims His beatitudes, as He does in our text for today—“Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are the pure in heart...” we really don’t see ourselves in there. But on the other hand, we don’t see our neighbor in there either. And in this, we’re correct—in a way. The only one who really belongs in the beatitudes is the one who spoke them. Jesus belongs in there. “Poor in spirit...meek...peacemaker...merciful...pure in heart...”—Jesus is the only one who fits. We don’t call Him Saint Jesus, but we could. Saint, in the strict sense of the word, means holy. “Holy Jesus,” we sing in a few of our hymns. But then, Jesus doesn’t need a “saint” before His name, because it’s understood. God is holy. That is His nature. Jesus wasn’t declared holy by some pope. He never sinned, not once. Holiness, sainthood, belongs exclusively to Him.

But today is not, “The day of the Saint.” It’s All Saints Day. Yes, it’s the Lord’s Day, but He’s not the only saint here. All the saints gather together when Christ is worshipped. David, Peter, Paul, Matthew, and all the saints in the Old Testament and the New are worshipping with us right now.

Did I call them saints? Yes, because God does. God’s holy people are His saints. We’re not holy like Jesus is holy. It’s not in our nature. It’s certainly not in our behavior. How can an adulterer, and murderer, and persecutor, and thieving swindler be named saints? Because they trusted in Jesus. Being a saint is not about how we live, but the fact that we live our lives in Christ. Being a saint is not about doing some heroic deed, but trusting in the deeds of Christ. Saints are not developed over time. They are named, declared, not by us but by God. He names as His saints those who trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

And a saint cannot be called a saint until after he or she dies. Does that leave us out? Not at all. Because the death that matters is the death of Christ, which we partake of in our baptism. Are you a saint? To answer that, don't go looking at how you've treated your neighbor over the last few weeks. Don't look at how you're doing with the Ten Commandments. Look at your baptism—at the fact that you died with Christ in the water, and also rose together with Him there. Your baptism joins you with Jesus, so that what He is, you now are. He is holy. So you are holy in God's eyes; washed clean of your sins, forgiven of every wrong. He is God's Son. So you are a child of God; one of His holy saints.

Everything said of Christ is now said of you, the baptized. Those beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are the pure in heart..."—all of them—all of those "blesseds" belong to you...right now...because you are in Christ. God doesn't call you blessed because of how you live, but because you trust in Jesus to whom you are united in the waters of baptism.

Do saints act in a certain way? Can you tell who is a saint? God knows who His saints are. They are in Christ. As such, God's saints strive to overcome the world and our own sinful flesh in the strength of Christ. They know how difficult this is, so they will be in God's Word regularly. They hunger and thirst for that Word—not so much as a guide to live by, but because through the Scriptures, God's saints are strengthened in their baptismal life in Christ.

They are fully aware that they sin daily, and so God's saints hunger and thirst for the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. They desire the Word of Absolution spoken by God through the mouth of His pastor. As long as they live in this world, God's saints know that they need the forgiveness that Christ freely gives through these means of grace.

A saint will not see himself as a saint, but only as a poor sinner who trusts in Jesus Christ. He or she will not be proud of his or her good works, but will have a humble spirit, believing that all he has, including his faith, is a gift from God in Christ. A saint is not perfect. Nothing a saint does will be free from sinful motives. A saint simply keeps looking to his baptism with the comfort that: Although I know that I'm a very wicked sinner, yet my baptism keeps reminding me that for Jesus' sake God has forgiven me, and He declares me a blessed saint in Christ; and therefore, the kingdom of heaven belongs to me.

God is not moderate when it comes to His saints. He went to the extreme to cleanse His saints of their sin. We may like to travel down the middle of the road, but Jesus allowed Himself to be forced down the road of suffering; the road that ended at the cross. Why? For all the saints, that's why. So that we, like the saints before us, may rest from our labors in our heavenly home.

And those saints before us are here with us. For where Christ is, there are His saints. And so today we remember those saints who rest from their labors, and who worship Christ with us. Saints like Marybelle and Lydia, Leona and Hulda, Leonard, Walter, and Grover, and Alveria. We cannot see them, but we remember them. And we join with them in singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!" When

we sing that hymn later, all of heaven sings with us. And you can sing in moderation if you want, but I doubt if the whole company of heaven will be singing that way.

So rejoice this day. You are washed clean of your sins in the waters of baptism. You are one of God's blessed ones. You are in Christ who suffered, died, and rose for you. You are God's saints. Amen.