

## **Sermon for All Saint's Day 2013**

Today is All Saint's Sunday and throughout the years the church has gathered to give thanks for the people who have witnessed to their faith in Jesus Christ in every generation. While we may know about such saints as St. Francis of Assisi or St. Augustine of Hippo; All Saint's Day began as a way to remember the nameless martyrs of the faith who the church didn't want to be forgotten. So today we give thanks to those who have gone before us for the many blessings that they and God have given us.

But if we were to look closer at the lives of these saints we would say that they didn't know very much about blessings—at least not the way that the world understands blessings. Many didn't know about wealth and those that did like St. Francis gave it all up and they lived in poverty. They weren't looking for status or power. They chose to work for little or no money at all to serve the poor. For this many of the saints were hated and killed because of the faith they so boldly proclaimed.

But the saints weren't concerned about how the world perceived blessings; they patterned their life after Jesus and his standards. Standards that are radically different from the world's. Jesus tells us in today's Gospel reading, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what

their ancestors did to the prophets.” Wow, poverty, hunger, mourning, hatred, exclusion, revilement, and defamation. These don’t exactly sound like blessings to me! But they are to Jesus and these are the people to whom the kingdom of God is entrusted!

Some of us are probably thinking, “How can we entrust the kingdom to people who can’t manage their money?” Others of us may be thinking, “The kingdom of God is just a fancy term thrown about by the church. It isn’t anything that could happen here on earth—there’s way too much violence.” But the saddest thought of all is that some of us will hear these words and think that Jesus will take care of the poor, the sad and the hated in heaven and we have no responsibility in the matter.

But Jesus knows us too well and in the next sentences gives us a stern warning: “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation! Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry! Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep! Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets!” In other words, woe to you who don’t know what poverty looks like or what hunger feels like or who have never mourned or who manage to tell everyone what they want to hear instead the truth they need to hear.

Amid these blessings and woes God is calling us to action—to bear witness to the kingdom of God! The kingdom of God isn’t some abstract place that the world will never know. It’s a place that we can all know—now. It breaks through when we love our enemies. It takes hold of us when we do good to those who hate us.

It comes alive when we bless those who curse us. It shines brightly when we pray for those who abuse us. It shows up when we honor the request of beggars. And when we begin to treat others as we would want them to treat us; we become citizens of that kingdom.

But building the kingdom isn't easy just as life with God isn't easy. Life with God means that we'll know what it means to be poor, hungry, mourning and cursed. Life with God means that we'll be unpopular and overlooked and hated. But that's who builds the kingdom of God—living stone by living stone—people who know about poverty, hunger, sorrow and being cursed; people who know how it feels to be overlooked; people who know how it feels to be hated.

So today we are called to live by different standards; standards not of this world, but of the kingdom. It starts by loving our enemies, by showing kindness to people who don't deserve it, by blessing those who curse us, by praying for those who mistreat and take advantage of us, by listening and honoring those who are forced to beg. But this isn't easy for us to do because we are both saint and sinner. We're a saint because of our baptism and a sinner because of our human nature. The saint in us wants to bring out the kingdom of God, but the sinner in us fights it all the way. The sinner in us listens to the world and not to the beggars. But thanks be to God that it's not all up to us because left on our own we would fail miserably. But as Jesus also tells us what is impossible for humans is possible for God!