

## “Blessed are the Saints”

Today’s Gospel reading is The Beatitudes, a well known passage in the Bible. It starts with “Blessed are the poor in spirit.... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek....” Jesus blesses those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn and those who are meek, and says, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, they will be comforted and they will inherit the earth.”

Jesus is talking about the citizens of the coming kingdom of heaven.

The word, “kingdom,” sounds archaic and doesn’t seem fitting to modern ears, does it? So let’s use the words, “God’s world,” in place of “the kingdom of heaven today.” So here Jesus is talking about God’s world, how it may look; what the citizens there are like; what their characters are.

When Jesus talked about God’s world, he meant both future and present. The coming God’s world is God’s world in full scale that will come in the future, and also God’s world that has already started in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. In other words, God’s world has already entered into the present age, among us. It’s here.

Who are the citizens of God’s world? The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted and those who are insulted because they belong to God’s world, because they want God’s world to be realized here on earth.

When we look closely at those nine blessings, the Beatitudes, we might notice that they build on one another. The 20<sup>th</sup> century missionary, E. Stanley Jones, observed that we could really divide these nine Beatitudes into three sets of three, with each set of three Beatitudes following the same pattern: thesis; antithesis and synthesis.

When we look at the Beatitudes, we may begin to see that Jesus is laying the foundation for citizenship in God’s new world, which he will continue to flesh out in the passages and chapters that follow the Beatitudes.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Many people have debated what “poor in spirit” means. Though the interpretations may differ slightly, many seem to come to this conclusion. The poor in spirit are “those who voluntarily empty themselves so that they can be filled by God.” The people who know that their lives are empty without God. *Thesis*.

“Blessed are those who mourn.” This beatitude focuses the attention from the inward to the outward. Disciples who are poor in spirit, who have turned their attention **away from themselves** ... to God, now turn their attention to the world and begin to see it as it currently is -a world that has much pain. Those who mourn are blessed because they enter into the world’s pain and grief. This is *Antithesis*, according to Stanley Jones, from inward attention to outward attention.

“Blessed are the meek.” The meek are not “wimpy” Christians. They are willing to surrender themselves to God as “the poor in spirit,” and have passion for the pain of the world as those who mourn. *Synthesis*.

If the first three beatitudes gave us a pattern for emptying ourselves, these next three teach us with what we are to be filled.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Another way of translating the Greek word for righteousness is “justice.” The blessed here are those who hunger and thirst for God’s justice in the world and participate in bringing it to those who need it most. *Thesis*.

But those who serve to bring God’s justice into this world, can easily turn to self-righteousness, whether it is about social justice or inner righteousness before God. So here it comes, “Blessed are the merciful.” Those who have hungered and thirsted for God’s justice are to show mercy to those who need it most and even to those who obstruct God’s justice in the world, because they do not know what they are doing in a deeper sense. This is *Antithesis* to “those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

When we put the passion for justice and the compassion of mercy together, we come to the “pure in heart,” who are both righteously merciful and mercifully righteous. This is *Synthesis*.

When we put “the meek,” and “the pure in heart” together, two *syntheses*, we may get “peace makers.”

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” The peacemakers are not just peace lovers. They are willing to engage conflict with peace, to work for justice, and hang on ... as long as is necessary despite the sabotage that will inevitably come from those who are unmotivated or unwilling to change. This is *Thesis*.

What comes **against** peacemaking efforts, as *antithesis*, is persecution. “Blessed are those who are persecuted.” Jesus says that “if you are a peacemaker, you are blessed! If you are a persecuted peacemaker, you are blessed again!”

The final beatitude is a variation of the previous one. You’re blessed yet again if, after being persecuted because of your peacemaking, they insult you and slander you—lie and talk trash.

It doesn’t sound good, does it? But Jesus seems to be saying that to be a citizen of God’s world takes sacrifice; or to expand God’s world with justice and peace requires more than just sitting around hoping it will happen.

The Beatitudes teach us what it means to be a citizen of God’s new world and invite us to continue to grow in those characteristics, into sainthood.

Today is All Saints Day, to honor all the saints from the past and the present, to commemorate all Christian people of every time and place. So today, let's honor them with blessings. Before I read each Beatitude, I will name them first, such as the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful and so on and I will pause. When I name them, would you please name specific saints that come to your mind that have those characteristics? For example, when I say, "the peacemakers," who comes to your mind that has the characteristics of peacemakers? The person may be somebody who was a member of this congregation and now is in God's world above, the church triumphant. The person may be a well known person in the past or in the present. The person may be someone who is sitting with you right now. Please name them either with voice or in your heart, those who embody the characteristics of the citizens of God's world. Then I will read each Beatitude as a way of honoring and blessing those saints, named with voice or in silence. I will replace "the kingdom of heaven" with "God's world" when I read.

The poor in spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is God's world.

Those who mourn.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

The meek.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The merciful.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

The pure in heart.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

The peacemakers.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons and daughters of God.

Those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is God's world.

Those who are insulted, persecuted, and have all kinds of evil falsely said against them.

Blessed are they when people insult them, persecute them and falsely say all kinds of evil against them because of Jesus, for great is their reward in God's world, for in the same way people persecuted the prophets who were before them.

May God bless all the saints on earth and in heaven, in God's world here and above; well known and ordinary, named and unnamed, those who went before us and those who are with us. Amen.