

All Saints' Day (Observed): November 3, 2019
“Blessed are the Saints: The Truth of the Cross”

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this observance of the Feast of All Saints' is from our Gospel Lesson, Matthew 5. As Jesus begins His first lengthy sermon recorded in Matthew, we hear, “**Matthew 5:3-10**”

It is really a shame that we celebrate Reformation Day and The Feast of All Saints' a week apart. It has caused a break between these two days that is unnatural. The posting of the 95 Theses on October 31 was no accident. The history of the celebration of All Saints' Day is akin to the celebration of Christmas. For the first several decades, the apostles celebrated every Lord's Day as an Easter Festival. We retain much of this language in our own proper prefaces, as we point directly to the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. In the first common proper preface we pray, “On this Day, you overcame death and the grave, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.”

After a period of time, the early church decided it would be important to observe other days and important events in the life of Christ and His Church. The earliest hard evidence for a Christmas feast being celebrated by the church in Rome was 336 A.D., while the Church in North Africa may have done it earlier. All Saints' Day is first mentioned in the 2nd Century A.D. Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred and in a document dated just after 155, it is written, “*The Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.*”

Ephraim the Syrian, Christian Bishop in Syria, mentions a common observance of All Saints' Day as early as 373. The point of this whole history lesson is this – we should think of these days, much like we do Christmas Eve and Christmas Day; they are to be observed and celebrated/thought of together. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are understood as two days celebrating the same event by highlighting two sides of the same coin—Christmas Eve highlights the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and Christmas Day highlights of the mystery of God in the flesh; so All Hallows Eve, Halloween, or as we call it today—Reformation is simply the beginning of the Feast of All Saints.

It is important to note this; because, just as the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh seek to not hallow God's Name or let His Kingdom come, it has sought to infiltrate these important teachings.

We observe this ancient feast of remembering the saints who have gone before us, beginning with the one who made them holy—Jesus. It really is a reminder of the First Petition – Hallowed be THY NAME. How is God's name kept holy? When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity (the emphasis of Reformation Day on October 31) and we as the children of God also lead holy lives according to it (the emphasis of November 1, All Saints' Day)—help us to do this dear father in heaven.

While it may seem strange for Luther to post the 95 Theses on Halloween, and for us to remember that day, it actually makes the most sense. The day that we know as being preoccupied with the frivolity of death and the devil and the darkness of the world, is actually a day that used to be about proclaiming the victory of life over death; really, ***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”***¹

We all know that Luther was against the sale of indulgences, but it is much more than that—by posting the 95 Theses on the eve of All Saints' Day, the faithful who walked into the church the next day to celebrate the Feast, would no doubt see the truth of the Gospel—man cannot save themselves! By Luther's time, the sale of indulgences had been around for several centuries, and what had resulted was people were more afraid of purgatory than God. Christians cared more about avoiding purgatory than living and dying a Christian life and death. October 31, 1517 was a call for the Church of God to return to the authority of Scripture, and highlighted by the Day of All Saints', those who lived and died in the faith, as examples of the purity of doctrine and life as witnesses to Christ and His redeeming work. It was a day that the Church was called to return to faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone through Scripture alone.

¹ Psalm 23:4

It should not be surprising that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh have gone to great lengths to defile Halloween and All Saints' Day with anything and everything that distract from Christ's defeat of Satan and victory over death.

It is here where our text from Matthew sheds light on exactly what that means – the cross is a reality. As much as it doesn't make sense to the sinful mind, the suffering are blessed. As ridiculous as it sounds, through the bloody, sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross is life for the world. As ludicrous as it sounds, through the death of the Son-of-God who became the form of a lowly, poor, miserable human, on the cross, payment for sin is given.

Look at each of these beatitudes, as they are normally called, with new and faith-filled eyes. ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*** The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh doesn't like the word poor. It doesn't like to admit it is destitute. It clings to the false notion, “I have something to offer God...If God knew who I really was...If I could just show Him how worthy, or nice, or how hard I am trying, then God will have to love me.” We tend to think of our niceness, or effort, or works for others as a currency, and if I have enough coins to show and write in my obituary, than surely God has to give me heaven.

But it is the poor in spirit that possess the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus hung on the cross He cried the words of Psalm 22 which include, ***“I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads.”***² Brothers and sisters in Christ, ***“Blessed is the one whose transgression (that is rebellion, and trust breaking) is forgiven (that is lifted up, carried away), whose sin is covered (that is put out of sight). Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”***³ Christ became poor in spirit, so that we who are poor in spirit, morally bankrupt, deceitful, transgressful sinners, in Christ, have the kingdom of heaven.

² Psalm 22:6-7

³ Psalm 32:1-2

“Blessed are those who are mourning, for they shall be comforted.”⁴ This is a mourning over sin. The devil, the world, and our own flesh hate the topic of sin. It would rather talk about anything else, or worse, redefine sin. The common false teaching is to say sin is something that is oppressive; so that, the only answer is social justice. We like to hear that sin is something that affects us, because then we can wash it away, or stay clean.

The reality of Reformation/Halloween and All Saints’ Day puts death right in our faces. We have no choice but to confess that sin is not just oppressive, sin is corruptive. I am a sinner. I am corrupt. I live in a sinful world, and I am not my own best friend. Misery loves company, and me, myself, and I do just fine together being miserable. Sin corrupts my body and soul, which affects the way I think, speak, and act. To be poor in spirit is to mourn over sin; it is to recognize that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but rather, **“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”**⁵

Jesus knew the miserableness of your condition, and died for you; to give you comfort and peace. On the night He was betrayed He said, **“Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”**⁶ He left that room, was handed over and crucified for you. While there is sorrow, the time of eternal joy is coming.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” This is the lowly, the humble. Jesus was born in a stable and placed in a manger. While He was of a royal line, He did not live that way, **“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”**⁷

⁴ Matthew 5:4

⁵ Psalm 121:1–2

⁶ John 16:20–22

⁷ Matthew 8:20

That same innocent Lamb was silent before His accusers and died a horrible death. Rather than cursing those who nailed Him to the tree, He prayed, “***Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.***”⁸

“***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.***” It is not those who are hungry for power, or thirst for justice. It is those who hunger and thirst for one thing—righteousness. It is in Jesus, through Jesus, by Jesus, that God has done it—***“He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”***⁹ Jesus is “***the bread of life; whoever comes to [Him] shall not hunger, and whoever believes in [Him] shall never thirst.***”¹⁰ Jesus proclaims, “***Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.***”¹¹

The saints, those who are in the body of Christ, have these realities – poor in spirit, mourning over sin, meek, hungry and thirsty for God’s Word and His righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and persecuted. At the same time, because they are in Christ, through His Word, washed in His water, and inwardly digested through the body and blood tasted in, with, and under bread and wine – you have the kingdom of heaven, comfort, the earth (that is all of God’s creation), satisfaction/contentment, mercy, God, are called sons of God, and again, as a reminder, the kingdom of heaven. By doctrine and life, God has given as reminders and gifts for you. While the world seeks to destroy Christ and His Kingdom, God has already won. While the devil seeks to undermine God’s gifts and tempt you away to forget His Word and live against God’s Word, despising God’s gracious gifts, Christ is already yours. While your sinful flesh seeks to paganize the one true God, to either forget His wonderful Hand, or place His creation above Him, you are Sons of God.

⁸ Luke 23:34

⁹ Luke 1:52–53

¹⁰ John 6:35

¹¹ John 4:14

We hold to God's Word and recall the lives of the Saints'; not as those whose works can forgive our sins, but as examples of faith and life. People have not changed, and the Church of God has been under attack from those in the world since Abel. Putting October 31 and November 1 together, can help us in recalling the reality of death and suffering. You are blessed. You have Christ, right here. Through Word, through water, through bread and wine, with angels, and arch-angels and the whole company of heaven, we laud and magnify God's glorious name,

*“Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light.*

*Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.*

*And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.”¹² Amen.*

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹² For All The Saints LSB 677: 2,4,5

Prayer of the Church
All Saints' Day (Observed)
3 November 2019

Encouraged by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us pray for God's people to endure to the day of Christ's coming and for the needs of all people as we approach that blessed day. For all of God's children who have been baptized into Christ and who rejoice in Him by faith, for our remembrance of those who went before us with the sign of faith and now rest from their labors, and for those who do not yet know God's mercy in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the poor in spirit who know their sin, grieve over their guilt and seek the grace of forgiveness; and for those who mourn what sin and death have done to all people and to our broken world, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who hunger for righteousness and seek to do that which is good and right and true, and for the good works that shine with Christ's light in this world of shadows and darkness, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the merciful who show compassion and forgive as Christ has loved and forgiven us, for purity of heart that we may seek the Lord and serve His holy purpose, and for those who seek peace through the blood of Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the persecuted Church throughout the world, for a bold witness in the face of rejection and threat, and for the martyrs who choose faithfulness rather than deny Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the nations and those who govern here and in every place; for the fruits of mercy; for an impartial system of justice; for the protection of the weak, aged and unborn; and for freedom to worship the Lord in spirit and truth, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has granted another year of earthly life, especially His servants *Marvin, Tim, Roger and Eric*; that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and that God would strengthen their trust in His goodness all the days of their life; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord have mercy.**

For the sick in their afflictions, for the aged and infirm in their struggles, for the dying in their final days on earth, and for the grieving who are wounded by the loss of those they love, [*especially Larry, Zoey, Dennis, and those we name in our hearts,*] let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the will to keep faith with the saints who have gone before us, for wisdom as we contend for the faith against the enemies of God's Word, for faithful preaching and teaching, and for all those who serve us with the Lord's Word and Sacraments, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For faith and repentance to receive for our benefit the body and blood of Christ in this holy Sacrament, for our unity of doctrine and life as God's people, and for the fruits of this blessed communion to be displayed in the grace of holy living, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Merciful Father, whose dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, rose victoriously over death and the grave, we remember with thanksgiving Your faithful people who have trusted in Christ, whose tears are gone, and whose sorrows You have turned to joy, especially over this past year *Douglas, Wanda, Phillip, Darlene, and Bruce*. We humbly implore You to strengthen us in the confident hope of the resurrection of the dead and of the life of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**