

St Pius-St Anthony All Saints Day Year A

All Saints Day gives a preview of the halls of heaven! A who's who of all the holy women and men who lived faithful lives following Christ here on earth and out of earth right on into heaven. We refer to that as the Communion of Saints, the body of believers who receive the reward of bliss with God eternally in heaven. I think of it as a spiritual version of the old DC Comics Superheroes Hall of Justice or Justice League that highlighted all the great ones: the super-friends Green Lantern, Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, Robin, Aquaman, Green Arrow, Flash, Atom Well the communion of saints is the holiness Hall of Fame for Christ's faithful ones. Our first reading spoke about the 144,000 (Rev 7:4,9) who stand at the front of a 'great multitude' too numerous to count of those who endured to the end keeping faith with Christ. We call them Saints. Or as Hebrews 12:1 refers to them as the 'cloud of witnesses' around the Lamb's throne. Saints are those who purify and sanctify and make good the experience and life handed them, seeking always to live God's will. The saint seeks to be imitators of Christ, to look like Christ. As St Paul says, "I urge you to imitate me, AS I imitate Christ." (1 Cor 11:1). So, All Saints Day gives us a glimpse of heaven and what we are to imitate about Christ. Traditionally, we have called heaven the Beatific Vision.

What is the Beatific Vision? It is seeing God, God's dwelling of heaven, or seeing any/everything just as God sees it! And we don't have to wait til heaven to see, as God sees. Jesus gives us a peek in His Sermon on the Mount. He lists what we call 'the Beatitudes', which are heavenly perspectives. He certainly embodies all of these Beatific qualities. As if Jesus is saying, "And if you want to see heaven, then first take on this quality". I am struck that so many of the Beatitudes end with the assurance (blessed) of heaven. As if the Beatitudes are saying, 'Input-poor in spirit' then, 'Output-Kingdom of Heaven'. 'Input-peacemaker' then 'Output-child of God'. Again, I see heaven described or pictured in the beatitudes. The first and last beatitude (opening and closing) end by saying, "theirs is the kingdom of God". Others specify, "they will be children of God", "they will see God", they will comforted, satisfied, given mercy and inherit it all! Those rewards, they all sound like heaven to me.

Yet, I know a lot of us hear the beatitudes and think 'Blessing'? To mourn, be poor, be persecuted, meek, hungry and thirsty—those are blessings? It does shock us out of what we normally expect. But might heaven do that too? I'm saying that I think Jesus is revealing another world to us. Yes, of course it is not what we expect or what we usually see in this world. But that is why; it is still only this-world-thinking. Heaven is other-worldly. Beyond. So we have to stretch (tiptoe) to see the kingdom of heaven. But we can; just as we are all called to be saints. It's a challenge; it is going to push us; but that's rebirth. Being born again.

I suggest that these signs of sanctity, the Beatitudes, are the refocusing from this world into the next, heaven itself. And we can see through some of the beatitudes. I 'd like to just take a couple of them and show this heavenly glimpse or Christ-like vision (it could be done for all of them).

How about "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:3)? To be poor is heaven? Jesus is teaching us that heaven is about so much more than stuff-material well-being. He is saying that to receive anything in these hands, they first have to be emptied. This is captured in the music lyric singing 'the moment I let go of it, was the moment I got more than I could handle'. Or I hear the Greek Stoic Epictetus saying, 'True wealth consists not in having a lot possessions, but in having few wants.' Or the Roman Seneca who said, "The poor man is not the man who has just a little, but instead poor is the one who is always craving more." Jesus is saying that the person too attached to this world-stuff in it, is not going to make it to the next. Like trying to get out of a fire, distracted by grabbing everything along on the way out--Not going to make it

Or how about the second Beatitude "Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4)? I hear Jesus saying, 'Hang on. There is no end to heaven', and that if I have something to mourn here, I should be thankful I had any of it to begin with! Another song caught that with the lyrics, "Better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." Or if you are a Winnie the Pooh fan, do you remember him saying, "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard"? Jesus brings the blessing, to each of these beatitudes.

Or one last (the actual last one) the eighth beatitude "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:10). What you have won, you own! Coal under pressure becoming a diamond, or the highest heat purifying metals. We rise through adversity, like the strongest winds producing the heartiest, tallest timber. The greater brings out the greatest. And in the end, the stars don't shine without darkness, so "Blessed are those persecuted for goodness' sake, the kingdom of heaven is theirs"

This All Saints Day puts before us a vision of heaven: the Beatitudes. And as the saints imitated Christ, so if we disciples of Him, we are also called to follow Him; to imitate Him through His beatific qualities: to be peacemakers, to hunger and thirst for justice, to be meek, and merciful, to be poor in spirit and pure of heart, and to even mourn with others or mourn ourselves if we haven't met these beatitudes yet. Again, if we seek Jesus, He will bring the blessing of these to us!