

All Saints Sunday
St. Matthew 5:1-12
November 5, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Count Your Blessings

“Open my lips, O Lord, and let my mouth proclaim your praise!” So begins the portion of scripture from Psalm 51, which opens the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families at the beginning of the day in the Book of Common Prayer.

And with those words, I like to begin my day. I often add the following few lines, not from the Biblical text, but I believe they are in keeping with it: Open my lips, O Lord, and let my mouth proclaim your praise! Good news and not bad news. Peace and not conflict. Humble and meek and not proud. Blessings and not curses. The biblical text goes on to say, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

I think in that little prayer, the words of the beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel are summed up: We are to appreciate the blessings God has given us, and then we are to put them into action. This is what Saints do.

When I think of the Matthean Beatitudes from this morning's Gospel, I am reminded of a few Saints I have known or heard about in my life:

Blessed are the poor in spirit. I think of Francis and my friend Richard. Poverty of Spirit is about not focusing on what you don't have, but on what you have now. Poverty of Spirit is about emptying out yourself and passing along your blessings to others. I am reminded of the song, “The Lord's Bright Blessing” which Bob Cratchit sings in Magoo's Christmas Carol. He notes that his family may not have a Christmas tree with presents under it, but that they have the miracle of now, and with their family assembled for the holiday: Bob Cratchit sings:

We'll have the Lord's bright blessing,
And knowing we're together
Knowing we're together heart and hand.
We'll have the whitest Christmass,
The very brightest Christmas

A Christmas far more
Glorious than Grand!
We can't afford to have a hen,
We will some day, I vow.
So I suggest you dream of then,
And prize what we have now."

... This is one of the best examples of this value expressed in popular culture, and it is coming up to be reshowed in the holiday season next month. It is also a wonderful way to count your blessings in the midst of poverty, not focusing on what you lack, but what blessings you do have now.

Mourning- These are they who cry over the inhumanity in our world, and are moved beyond their tears to show compassion upon the less fortunate and the victims of inhumanity. Their sadness and empathy moves them to take action. I'm thinking here of Mother Teresa, for example.

Blessed are the Meek. Those who give God the credit, and shun any attention pointed to themselves, not claiming any credit, but knowing how they have been blessed, giving credit to the author and benefactor of our lives. I am thinking here of my friend Mark Nikkel, Patron of the Sudan. Whenever famous church or political leaders visited him in the Sudan, Mark would always hide in behind them in the back row, never calling attention to himself. But he was always a vocal advocate for them, always there for the Christian people living in Sudan when they needed him. Mark was strong in faith, but meek in behavior when it came to claiming any credit or attention.

Hunger for Righteousness- I am thinking here of William Wilberforce, and Anglican layman, whose story was chronicled in the movie, *Amazing Grace*. He hungered and thirst for justice to replace injustice and dedicated his life to ending the institution of slavery in Great Britain, long before we did so in America.

Peacemakers- I am thinking here of Desmond Tutu, Arch-Bishop of South Africa, whose post-Apartheid program of amnesty brought healing, forgiveness and peace to his country, without further curses and hate and recriminations. He brought together those divided by pain and the hurt of the past, which enabled peace to take root in South Africa. Would that we had done this after our civil war.

Persecuted- I remember the story of St. Stephen [in Acts 5:59-60] "While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on

his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.” Amongst those participating in the stoning of Stephen was a man named Saul, whom we know now as St. Paul. Imagine not only witnessing to the reality of your faith in the face of certain death, but making your last act a Christian one by forgiving those who have perpetrated this persecution upon you! Here is a man who truly passed on his blessings to us.

Pure of heart- Any Saint you can think of, whether on the calendar or one whom you have met possesses this one. Hopefully we recognize our vocation and calling to be saints and strive to live with pure hearts. I have known more than a few in my life.

To be pure and clean in your heart sounds like a tall order. We may feel as though we are not up to the task. I would suggest otherwise.

What is a clean heart? What does it mean for Jesus to say, “Blessed are the pure in heart? The word in the New Testament is a translation of the Greek word, “katharos”, which roughly is the root for the word, “Catharsis,” in the English language which usually means a release of emotion and pain from ourselves. When a Catharsis is provoked, it is an opportunity to empty out of our hearts the pain and sadness, the apprehension and anxiety that have built up inside us. In one older English translation of the word, it suggested that purifying the heart was an opportunity to empty out, that is, purge away all the ‘dross’ from your soul. To purify is to cleanse, and so to live with a pure heart is to live with a heart that is clean of any alien matter.

What is this alien matter? It is the spiritual junk we collect over a lifetime. It includes guilt, shame, memories of our failings, messages that tell us we are failures who will never succeed at what we set out to do. All of this spiritual effluent is contrary to what God would will for us. God wants to bless us and not curse us, as we heard so clearly in the Gospel this morning. We need to expel it from our hearts, realizing that we have been forgiven by God, and with God’s blessings upon us, we are empowered to live a full and fulfilling life.

God wants to bless you. We witness this in the blessings he passes on to us in the Sermon on the Mount and the many blessings we can count each morning. Open your heart, mind and life to receive God’s blessing. All Saint’s tide is a time we remember those blessed people who shared their blessings and joy with others and us. November is count your blessings month. Go forth and do so each day, and be sure to share those with others today! AMEN