

You Are Blessed! **A Sermon for All Saints Day (A)**

I recall once going on rounds with a friend of mine who was a hospital chaplain. 'My parish' as she called it was extensive and included several floors of a large city hospital from the ICU to the cardiac wing, from the emergency room to the rooms of patients recovering from surgery. Yet no matter where she went or to whom she visited, her greeting upon entering was always the same: 'Hello, I'm Reverend Sally, and blessed are you!'

At first, I confess I was taken aback. 'Blessed are you?!' To someone with stage-four cancer? Someone injured in a car accident? 'Blessed are you,' to a heart patient? A stroke victim?

What I was missing by her greeting was both her intention, and her much clearer understanding than mine of Jesus' words that begin the Sermon on the Mount, words we call the Beatitudes. What Sally knew and remembered was what I had forgotten that Jesus is not pronouncing a blessing so much as he is affirming a sacred fact. Jesus is saying (adding Sally's and later Jesus' pronoun to each phrase) Blessed are you who are poor in spirit! (Hear it that way.) 'Blessed are you who are meek, and merciful, and pure of heart. Blessed are you who strive to make peace.'

Jesus is addressing those who have been and who are now blessed not because God singles out certain persons for special favor, but because their faith in God and in God's promises through Christ has brought to them a blessedness, a holiness that all but certainly has radiated out (as holiness does) to others, producing blessings and graces all their own.

For from this state of blessedness emerging, it might be (and as Jesus relates), from a condition of poverty or grief or painful struggle from suffering and sacrifice has come God's recompense (if you will), a further blessed gift

So to the poor in spirit awaits the kingdom of heaven. To those who mourn, comfort. To the meek, the earth. To those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, complete and vindicating satisfaction. And to the peacemakers of the world, a full inheritance as children in the household of God. Blessing upon blessing, gift upon gift.

By saying, then, 'Blessed are you' to each one she met, what was my friend intending? To be clear, she wasn't glossing over their separate miseries. She knew far better than me (far better than most) how distinctly un-blessed the lives of suffering humanity could be; and how absent God could seem to those who bore the burden of illness and injury. She saw the wounds, physical and emotional; she felt the pain, psychic and spiritual. She had stood by hospital bedsides for almost twenty years, with family all around, as she sought to comfort a soul about to make its final journey. Their tears had been her tears. She had held their hands in her hands, and their hopes in her heart.

I think what Sally was reminding each one of finally was their identity. No matter their condition, no matter their fear, no matter how uncertain the recovery. She was saying to them what Jesus says to the crowds, 'You are blessed.' It may not appear that way now, but it's the truth, as true as your own life, as true as anything has ever been. And equally true are the gifts God will bestow on the blessed, those blessed 'reversals' in fate and fortune all because you have believed and have sought to live that belief, all because you are blessed.

All this my sister priest knew, and it was something she humbly taught to me. But she knew something else, something as equally important. By reminding each patient that they were blessed, she was also acknowledging to them that they were saints.

Long before Christians started to think of the saints solely as members of a heavenly communion (existing somewhere up there'), the word was meant to apply to all the faithful, to all members of the Body of Christ here on earth, to all the saints of the Church, the living as well as the dead. Or as our familiar opening hymn today proclaims it: 'All are one in Thee, for all are Thine.'

So we are the saints, you and I! Who would have guessed it?! We are the blessed, inheritors in real time of glories and wonders, skills and daring, life and love that can only increase until that future day of complete blessedness, of eternal rest. As a favorite Celtic poem of mine relates:

*Set free by Jesu's mortal wounds are we,
Blest with rich gifts and more shall be.
Blessings has he in endless store;
Some drops are showered upon us here;
What when we hear the ocean's roar?*

Indeed, it may seem a small thing at times. Still, let us welcome even those drops of grace, while hearing also (be it from Maryland's or Cornwall's coasts!) that far off ocean's roar, the sound of celestial bliss. Simply put, let us be the saints that we are, the saints we were destined to be. By our words and work, let us remain a holy and blessed people made for love and deeds of love, a blest communion called by Christ to be Christ to a world waiting and eager for his blessing. Amen.

Blessings,
Fr. Gordon +