

All Saints' Day

The first day of November is All Hallows' or All Saints' Day.
The evening before All Saints' Day is therefore called All Hallows' Eve—later shortened to Halloween—but that's a whole other story.
This festival is not about ghosts and goblins, it's about people.
It's about saints who have fought the good fight—who have run the race—who have clutched the prize and now rest from their labors.
Sainthood is not limited to Peter or Augustine but it embraces all those who have been made holy by the blood of the Lamb and who now possess the Kingdom.
The Gospel appointed for All Saints' Day is often termed, "The Beatitudes."
These verses are--or ought to be--some of the most familiar verses of the Bible.
They are the first words of Christ's first sermon.
As such, they summarize the entire Christian life in brief, memorizable, verses.
And as the first words of Christ's first sermon, the first beatitude of all is this:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
And this is echoed again in the final beatitude.
"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of God."
These two beatitudes bracket the rest and set the tone for the other six, for the rest of the sermon, and for the rest of the New Testament as well.
So right off the bat we are told that the Christian life is no bed of roses.
Contrary to the world's way of thinking, blessedness is not manifested by success--lots of money, toys, friends and popularity and an ease of living.
Just the opposite, the saintly life is characterized by poverty and persecution.
And note well the tense of the verbs! Poverty and Persecution are not paths into to the Kingdom of God--things that we must do to get there...
Rather, they are characteristic of already being there! *"Theirs IS the kingdom..."*
So also, in each of the beatitudes, blessedness is a present reality--not future gain.
What is future is the seeing and experiencing of it.
"...they SHALL be comforted...SHALL inherit the earth...SHALL be filled...SHALL obtain mercy...SHALL see God...SHALL be called 'children of God.'"
But the present experience of the Kingdom is just the opposite.
You mourn without any consolation in sight.
You are meek and trodden down but it seems to profit you nothing.
You hunger and thirst for the righteous life but cannot attain it.
Your mercy toward others is not returned back to you.
You strive for a pure heart but see only the filth of impure motives.
You seek to make peace but fail and only feel like a child of the devil.
The more you strive to keep the beatitudes and live by them, the more they seem to mock you and accuse you.
They both mock you in your inability to live them!
And they mock you in seeming to deliver on none of their promises!
They underscore your own spiritual poverty and lack of saintliness.
But behold! That brings us back to the beginning!
It is precisely the spiritually poor who are called blessed.
The kingdom of heaven belongs to none BUT them.

And this is so because your blessedness is found only in Christ and not in yourself.
Jesus Christ alone is the Blessed One who makes you blessed.
Your blessedness is found only in Christ and not in yourself or anywhere outside.
For He alone truly mourns. Not as we do.
He mourns not over personal losses and evils that come upon Him.
But He mourns over sin and the fallenness of His creatures.
He alone is meek, like a lamb let to the slaughter, so He opens not His mouth.
And as the Meek One He has inherited the earth for you.
So that in Christ, all things are yours--nothing is held back.
Jesus alone truly hungers and thirsts after righteousness
He does not crave after earthly mammon.
His food is to do the will of the Father.
His drink is the cup of suffering.
He alone is merciful--even praying for the forgiveness of those crucifying him.
And this mercy is visited upon you for you too have crucified Him.
He alone has a pure heart--unclouded by evil desires or mixed motives.
And from the pureness of His heart flows pure water of life.
And He is the true Peacemaker--who makes peace between God and man.
He comes to bring peace on earth and good will toward man.
In Him the wrath of God is stilled and our warring thoughts are quieted.
And so, in all of these ways, our blessedness is tied up with Christ.
By baptism into Christ, you are blessed. By trusting Him alone, you are righteous.
But notice this as well: That even though Jesus is the blessed one Himself, that even He does not experience its fruits now.
The Mournful One had no comfort but only stripes and is the man of sorrows.
The Meek One had no earth -- and even His clothing stripped away from Him
The Hungering One thirsted to the very end and was only given vinegar to drink.
The Merciful One was savagely punished and for the sins of others.
The Pure One did not see the face of God but was forsaken of God--and even the sun hid from His sight.
The Peacemaker was not called the Son of God but the son of Beelzebub.
And yet, to our great joy, these signs of shame do not change anything.
Rather, it is precisely in His poverty and persecution that Jesus is in His Kingdom.
There, on the cross, He is wearing His crown.
There, with thieves on His right hand and on His left, He is in His kingdom.
Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs IS the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
And by participating in Christ--by communing in His body and blood--that same kingdom is also yours.
By faith and not by sight. In truth but not in experience.
And with every saint--every sinner who has ever been made holy by the blood of the Lamb--you now share in the saintliness of Christ Jesus Himself.
For here we are in the presence of all the company of heaven.
Together partaking of the same Blessed One in His body and blood.
In faith receiving all that He is and gives to us.
Therefore, blessed are you, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven. AMEN.