

Thought for the Week 1st November 2020

Matthew 5:1-12

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Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them. He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We live in a world of instant gratification. We want it our way, right away. Is your internet too slow? Get high-speed internet! Does it take too long to fill up your car? Pay at the pump! Is snail-mail really that slow? Send email. Is your fast food not so fast? Too long to que at the Check-out? Self-scan and pay by card. We eat in our cars. We talk on the phone in our cars. We microwave our meals and we have *next-day-even-on-holidays* delivery of our packages! The one thing we don't have, it seems is patience. In the world today there seems to be no patience and no desire to look forward to things to come.

But on All Saints Day, this is precisely what we confess as Christians: there is an eternal city, a paradise of God, an eternity of rest and being with the Lord. But we don't have it yet. Now we have to walk by faith, not by sight, confessing the eternal joys of the life to come while still struggling in this sin-filled world of death.

Sometimes as Christians is that we think we should have all of this peace and rest right now in this life. No waiting. When we put our faith and trust in Christ and have our sins forgiven and are in a right relationship with God, then He should bless and reward us with a lack of problems. Christians shouldn't get sick. Christians shouldn't lose their job or have trouble paying their bills. Christians shouldn't have problems with their marriages or difficulties raising their children. The peace and joy and bliss of heaven really ought to be ours immediately, instantly, and right now. But then that's not the case - when we find ourselves far from God, unloving toward others and full of unbelief, despair we wonder what's wrong. We don't feel much like saints do we? Why? Could it be because we have let go of Christ's word and in our unbelief we have not heard what our Lord has said to us about what it really means to be a saint?

That's why we need to look again at what Jesus said "real life" is like as a Christian saint. We read it from Matthew 5. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are those who are persecuted for my sake." All of these "Beatitudes" (= blessings) that our Lord speaks describe the life of saints in this world.

Since we're thinking about All Saints Day, let's be very clear first of all about what we mean by "saint." Ask anyone on the street and they will probably say that a saint is a holy person who does a lot of good during their lifetime. They will probably be thinking of someone like Mother Theresa of Calcutta. But the bible says that everyone who is in Christ - everyone who has personally put their faith and trust in Christ for salvation and is living by faith in him is a saint. You are a saint if that describes you. So All Saints Day is your day!,

You see, it is not how we live that makes us saints, but how Christ lived for us, died for us and rose for us. Your faith in Christ makes you a saint. But we saints are poor, mourning, harassed, hungering, struggling saints. In this life, the path of sainthood--that is, of being a Christian often is one of hardship and sorrow that does not bring with it the "instant gratification" our world tries to buy and sell.

Let me explain what I mean by taking just a couple of these Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of God." "Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted." If you listen closely to the Beatitudes, you hear a description of those who are in Christ. The Beatitudes describe those who have been crushed by God's Law over their sins and have nothing going for them except Christ and His perfect life, death and resurrection for them, and His gifts delivered to them in the Gospel. The saints described by Christ are poor in spirit. That means they have nothing to bring before God to show how well off they are. They have a poverty of spirit, empty, nothing. Yet they have Christ, for "to such is the kingdom of God." They mourn over their sins. They are troubled and frightened by their lack of faith, they are grieved and sorrowful because they do not live to serve their neighbours in love. Such sin causes them to shed tears of repentance. In the Beatitudes Jesus describes those who are troubled by their sins, frightened by death, suffering for His Name, and who have nothing in themselves and their lives to cling to except Christ and the promise of His future blessings.

All this demolishes the world's and our own notions about what it means to be a saint. The world sees saints as those who lead some extraordinary life doing things for others. A life of near perfection and godliness. People who have a lot of faith and can talk easily about God. Saints

are, in the world's eyes, those "goody-goody" perfect people. To the world, saints are those who are pure in heart because they do good all the time. The trouble is the sinful flesh of a Christian grabs hold of this notion of sainthood and applies it him or herself. It's not "I must be a saint because I live a good life that is better than others" or "there is no way I can ever be a saint because I am not good enough; I am too sinful." Or, another idea: "If I just learn to live as Christ describes in the Beatitudes, I shall be a saint and shall have all these blessings".

No, we need to repent of all such ideas that sainthood is about us! It is about Christ and Christ delivered to us in the gospel.

After all, who is the One who is truly poor in spirit? Who had a poverty of everything and everybody? Was it not Christ? Who is truly a mourner over sins, One who makes peace and has mercy on others and who hungers and thirsts for righteousness? Is it not the Lord Jesus Christ who did all things for us, who hungered and thirsted to bring you righteousness by dying for our sins?

Indeed, the Beatitudes are not "Be-Attitudes" that we try to check off so that we can get blessings from God, they are descriptions of our Saviour, which become ours through being in Christ. Christ is poor in Spirit. Thereby, being in Christ, you are poor in spirit. Christ is pure in heart - so in Christ you are pure in heart. And so on for all of these Beatitudes. This is why Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for my sake." People are not attacked by the devil, world and flesh for "being good" but for having a righteousness that is not their own but Christ's. The world cannot stand those who trust in Christ instead of themselves. We need to believe it! If we are in Christ, then the world will hate us, the devil will target us and our sinful flesh will give us no rest.

The Gospel in which Christ comes to us is all we have in this world. There is no guarantee of easiness, comfortableness, riches, fame, fortune, etc. No, all we have in this life is our Saviour. But what else do we need? Nothing. Moreover, the promise of Christ is that you have a down payment, a guarantee of the blessings of the world to come. His Holy Spirit at work within us is this guarantee. Having Christ, you do indeed have everything, but not everything has been given to you just yet.

We confess in the Creed: *"I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."* It's coming. But it's not here yet. It's not like this world which demands everything instantly. For now, we as live in Christ, we will be poor in spirit, mourning, persecuted, and so on. But in this life, so long as we hold onto Christ, the One who calls us saints and who goes with, we can walk by faith and not by sight. Then, in the life to come, we shall see Him as He is, for we will be like Him and we shall live forever without fear, darkness, shame, sin, death, pain, suffering or tears.

This is the joy of the saints who have gone before us. This is the hope and future of all who are called saints in Christ. Happy All Saints Day, saints! Amen.

Points for Prayer

Sunday 1 November

- **Moderator** | *Please pray for the Moderator as he commences his presbytery tour of Armagh – which will be slightly restricted in scope. Pray for him and the congregations of First Lurgan and First Portadown as he leads their services on Sunday 1 November.*
- **Community in worship** | *Ask God to help us overcome the unnatural restrictions of social distancing as we join together to worship him with others and encourage one another in conversation.*

Monday 2 November

- **CCAP Zambia** | *PCI partners with the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Zambia Synod. Pray for Synod members as they meet together for the Synod meeting in mid-November, during which there will be leadership elections.*
- **CCAP Zambia** | *Rev Sevatt Kabaghe, General Secretary, asks us to pray for the ministers, that they would faithfully serve the Lord despite many challenges and that love and unity would continue in the Synod of Zambia.*

Tuesday 3 November

- **Healthcare chaplaincy** | *PCI has 54 chaplains in both large and small hospitals throughout Ireland. Pray for these chaplains as they minister to patients and their families at the current time of uncertainty and anxiety.*
- **Healthcare chaplaincy** | *Pray for the chaplains as they also minister to healthcare staff. Pray for these staff as they work long hours in difficult situations.*

Wednesday 4 November

- **Global mission worker in Zambia** | *Diane Cusick works in Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Zambia. Give thanks that schools were allowed to open at the end of September. Pray for the teachers that Diane works with, particularly for their extra workload as they ensure their classrooms are clean and safe.*
- **Global mission worker in Zambia** | *Pray for Diane as she works from home, encouraging and supporting ECD teachers around Zambia. Give thanks for the ways that she can stay connected with community.*

Thursday 5 November

- **Belfast Conference** | *Pray for the work of the Belfast Conference, as the three Belfast presbyteries collaborate to make decisions and allocate resources for ministry in the Belfast area.*
- **Belfast Conference** | *Pray that, although many activities are on hold for now, that there would be continued and renewed passion and vision for the work of the Church in Belfast.*

Friday 6 November

- **Social Witness** | *Pray for Adelaide House – residents and staff as they continue to work through a Covid-19 outbreak in the home. Give thanks for the patience of residents, dedication of staff and the understanding of families and friends.*
- **Vulnerable children and young people** | *Pray that a consultation on a plan developed in response to the challenges and risks facing children, young people and their families due to the Covid-19 pandemic would identify and support positive interventions.*

Saturday 7 November

- **General Council** | *The General Council Standing Committee met last Thursday. Pray for the outworking of the decisions made by ministers and elders as they deal with a number of challenging issues and seek to coordinate the overall work of the General Assembly's Councils.*
- **Reception of Ministers and Licentiates** | *Pray for ministers and licentiates from Ireland, Scotland, Hungary, Romania and Cuba who are at various stages in a process of transferring to PCI that they may know God's guidance and blessing as they seek to integrate with us.*