

## **“Defeat the Enemy with Mercy”**

**St. Matthew 5:1-12**

November 1, 2020

SERMON 1948

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Our sermon text is from Matthew 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Epistle reading presents us with a vision from chapter seven of St. John’s revelation. **It is a picture of the saints, our Christian forefathers, our family and friends, who have gone before us.** We, too, are saints, but these saints of God are separated from us by death. They enjoy eternal bliss before our Savior Jesus Christ. In time, that impediment will be removed as well, so that we will from one holy Christian and apostolic church.

In his revelation, St. John watched as six of the seven seals were opened. Before the contents of the seventh seal was unleashed to destroy the earth, the servants, or believers in Christ, were sealed on their foreheads. We are reminded of this fact whenever someone is baptized into Christ and the sign of the cross is made upon their forehead with oil. It is similar to the seals which are placed upon our food containers in order to preserve them. Believers in Christ are sealed by the forgiveness of sins, in order to preserve us from the destruction and death which comes upon this world on account of the curse of sin. And sure enough, neither death nor destruction will harm them or us.

St. John goes on to describe those who were preserved through faith in Christ as alive and well and standing before the throne and before the Lamb. The saints are “a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues...” These saints are our believing family and friends who have been faithful unto death and have received the crown of eternal life. They are saints! Saints are holy people. Their holiness consists of the white robe of Christ’s perfect righteousness. They are holding palm branches as a sign of their victory over sin, death and the devil. They are praising the God, to whom they give thanks. All the credit for their salvation goes to their God.

And now we switch camera views from heaven to earth. **In today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus gives us a view of the saints, the Christian believers, who are on earth, not yet in heaven.** Jesus is speaking about you and about me. Jesus seeks to teach us that we, too, are to view ourselves as saints, holy people. Though we are separated from the saints in heaven and have not yet had our sinful nature removed, we are still to regard ourselves as holy and preserved by our baptism into Christ. Through faith in Christ we are freed from the harm which is caused by sin, death and the devil.

In order to explain our situation here on earth, Jesus uses a series of beatitudes which describe the blessings which He has bestowed upon His holy church. These

truths are not self-evident; they need to be revealed so that we begin to view ourselves the way in which God views us. These beatitudes are the gifts which you received in the pronouncement of your justification through faith.

The presence of sin has tainted everything in this sinful world. When you came to believe in Christ, you became a part of the holy Christian church. Jesus says that you are in the world, but not of the world. And because you are not of the world, you will be persecuted for righteousness' sake. What the world says about your Christianity is often a lie. They say that you are a hypocrite, but you are a sinner trusting in Christ. They say that you are a hater, but they are lovers. They say that you think you are a holy roller, and better than others.

Jesus wishes to remind us saying "for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." You see, **we aren't the first ones to receive this kind of treatment.** There is comfort in knowing that this is the normal situation for the believer in this world. Like the post-surgery patient, there is a comfort in knowing that the pain is normal for a few days and will soon give way to better days. **Jesus tells us to rejoice and be glad,** though we are being persecuted, because we will soon enjoy that "reward in heaven," which was described in today's Epistle. At Jesus' direction, we do that very thing in the order of Matins, when we sing in the *Te Deum*, "The glorious company of the apostles praise you; the goodly fellowship of the prophets praise you; the noble army of martyrs praise you; the holy Church throughout all the world does acknowledge you." All of God's saints, whether in heaven or on earth, praise and honor our Lord who has made us His beloved children. But I get ahead of myself.

In today's Holy Gospel, Jesus wants us to see ourselves in his blessed proclamations. Let us walk through those beatitudes as I comment on each one giving us a reason to rejoice and be exceedingly glad.

**1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Thankfully our Lord has brought us to realize our sinful condition. Before we came to faith, we thought that we were in control of our spiritual situation. We thought that we were rich and boasted about our works and self-preparation. But now through the teaching of the Word of God, we have come to realize that we are poor, poor in spirit.

What a terrible thing it would be to realize only too late that you are poor and lacking. Like the ten foolish virgins who thought they were fine, but then realized that they don't have the oil for their lamps. When you realize that you aren't well-supplied, you reach out for help. The law showed us our need, and then the gospel offered us the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel richly and daily provides us with what we need. It supplies forgiveness and life. Through faith in Christ, the poor in spirit are blessed!

**2. "Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.**

Once we come to faith in Christ, we don't cease being poor in spirit. Our sinful nature clings to us until the day that we die. And thus, the Christian now mourns his sinful thoughts and words and deeds. While others seek to affirm themselves and their sinful desires, the Christian mournfully confesses when he has been led into temptation. Even the desire to sin, when not acted upon, is of concern to the Christian. The Christian does not want to hate his neighbor, lust after his neighbor's spouse, or covet another's possession. Nevertheless, the repentant Christian is blessed as he is comforted with the gospel message of forgiveness. There is immediate help for temptation. There is comfort for the guilty conscience. Through faith in Christ, those

who mourn their sin are comforted.

**3. “Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.**

A fish taken out of water will die. The poor-in-spirit Christian cannot live outside the baptismal waters of forgiveness. While mournfully confessing his sin, he is always being comforted by the words of absolution. If that is what a Christian is, how could he be proud. No, **the Christian has learned to be meek and humble** before a gracious and loving God. There is no boasting or demanding. There are confident cries for mercy and reliance upon His Redeemer.

If you thought it was the powerful and demanding ones who would inherit the earth, you would be wrong. It is the rare person who is able to wield power or riches and not be ruled by that power or wealth. Jesus said, “How difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God...” Usually those who have positions of power are corrupted by it. Those who have riches serve it like an idol, rather than are served by their wealth.

Only those who are meek Christians are able to properly inherit the earth, that is, using God’s gifts for its purpose. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:13, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” Only those who meekly follow our Lord’s guidance will properly use God’s earth. 1 Timothy 4:4-5, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” Through faith in Christ, the meek Christian inherits the earth.

**4. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.**

The Christian loves to hear the Word of God. They attend the Divine Service whenever they can. Like the body’s natural desire for food, so the Christian continually partakes of the Word and Sacraments. Through those means the Lord fills them with Christ’s righteousness with satisfies deeply. Through faith in Christ, church goers are filled with righteousness.

**5. “Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.**

The Christian is merciful to others, because he has received mercy from his God. Through faith in Christ, the merciful are blessed with mercy.

**6. “Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.**

This Sunday is All Saints’ Day. By saints we are not speaking about those who are considered holy because they do outwardly holy things. The saints of which we speak both whether in heaven or on earth are the pure in heart. Of course, the saints will want to lead holy and God-pleasing lives, but they do it because they are pure in heart through the forgiveness of sins. God has washed not only their bodies, but also their heart from the stain of sin. Through the forgiveness of sins Christians have been given a new heart, which fears and loves God. Through faith in Christ, the pure in heart will be transferred from the church here on earth to see God on His throne in heaven.

**7. “Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.**

There are some who seek to make peace by force, but that is only oppression. Others seek to make peace by agreeing to disagree, but that is only coexisting. True peace is one in which there is love between the parties. The Christians or sons of God are the only ones who get the disobedient to lay down their sins, and love their enemies. Through faith in Christ, the sons of God are the true peacemakers.

**8. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For**

**theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

The boastful make fun of those who are poor in spirit. The immoral can't allow the Christian to mourn his sin and strive to be morally upright. The proud cannot give up his idolatry long enough to inherit the earth. The works-righteous is filled with himself and does not hunger or thirst for Christ's righteousness. The wicked will persecute the merciful. The pure in heart will be reviled by those whose heart is lustful. Those who seek to manipulate and acquire, will not desire peace.

This world's wicked will persecute the saints.

**Of the Prophets**, Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Mt 29:37)

**Of the Apostles**, St Paul said, "9For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!" 1 Corinthians 4:9-10 (NKJV)

**Of Jesus**, St. Peter said, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. 14"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15"and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. Acts 3:13-15 (NKJV)

When the world persecutes you for your faith in Jesus, the righteous one, rejoice and be glad because this is proof that you are blessed. Only the blessed are attacked by the world. They will accuse you falsely and persecute you for faith and righteous living.

And now this leads me back to All Saints' Day. We are those saints or holy ones who are here on earth, as described by Jesus. We are refusing the temptations of our sinful nature, the world and the devil. We are mourning our sins and clinging to forgiveness. We are seeking to change hearts so that with a clear conscience we have peace with God. Jesus has warned us ahead of time that we will be persecuted for righteousness sake. He has warned us so that we will be included in the picture of the saints who have died and are in the vision from chapter seven of St. John's revelation. When Christ returns, there will be one holy Christian and apostolic church, no longer separated by death.

We conclude today's All Saints' Day commemoration with the Magnificat. It is the response of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the announcement of the angel that she would receive the child Jesus. Mary's song professes the truths taught in the beatitudes before Jesus ever preaches the Sermon on the Mount. Her song become our song. We are the blessed ones. We are the saints. Our soul magnifies the Lord and rejoices in God our Savior.

Matthew 5:1-12 (NKJV)

1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

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

4 Blessed are those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,  
For they shall inherit the earth.

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

7 Blessed are the merciful,  
For they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,  
For they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,  
For they shall be called sons of God.

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

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.