

Sermon 14

St Philip and St James
Palma de Mallorca Spain
30th October 2022
All Saints Day

Theme: Living a Sainthood Life

TEXT: Luke 6:20-31

Introduction

In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today we are celebrating the feast of All Saints day and I will not say much about the historical background of the feast since I touched on that area last year. This is the day we commemorate all the saints of the church, both known and unknown, who have attained heaven. It is an important day in this country as it is a public holiday where people from all over the country return to their town or village to lay flowers on the graves of deceased relatives. It is actually, for most people, a day of high emotions where the living are connected to their dead relatives. The text for our focus today is the Gospel reading of Luke 6:20-31.

Exegesis of the Text

This famous sermon by Jesus known as the Sermon on the Plain has great affinities with the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5-7. Luke's version is known as the Sermon on the Plain, because Jesus "came down with them, and stood on a level place" (6:17). Luke places the Sermon on the Plain (6:17-49) later in Jesus' ministry. Saints come in many varieties, but in Luke's Sermon on the Plain, Jesus focuses on certain kinds of people who receive his attention throughout his ministry: the poor, the hungry, the crying, and the hated or ostracized. There is a lot that follows in this fascinating passage. The word for "blessed" (*makarios*) is interesting enough, with its suggestion of quasi-divine happiness and good fortune, and we are reminded that money or material wealth can't buy happiness and that the best things in life aren't things. In this context, "woe" functions as a sharp contrast to "blessed," but in its Greek origins it does not mean "cursed" or "unhappy." It is more of an attention-getter and emotion-setter than a clear characterization or pronouncement. Jesus therefore promises relief to some groups, to

those people who travel rough roads through life. To others who find existence rather enjoyable or easy, he cries, “Look out!” It would be easy to hear the blessings and woes in today’s gospel as rewards and punishments or a categorization of saints and sinners, but that would be a mistake and misunderstanding of the text. There is nothing virtuous or holy about poverty, hunger, or grief. There is nothing sinful or wrong about being rich, full, or laughing. Jesus is not talking about what or how much we have or don’t have. Jesus is talking about a quality not a quantity. He is talking about how we are in the world, not what we are, but how we are. And I know from my own life that when I am poor, hungry, weeping, whether materially, emotionally, or spiritually, I am more open and receptive. I am looking for something new, a different way of being in the world. But when I am rich, full, and laughing, whether materially, emotionally, or spiritually, I most want more of the same. I am not looking for anything new or different. I work to defend and keep the status quo.

Application

So, what do the blessings and woes from first part of this passage have to do with Christ's instructions for living like true saints of God in the verses that follow? The text asks us some hard questions. It asks us to look at our life in light of Jesus' blessings and woes. What do the reversals in today's gospel bring up for you? In what ways do they challenge or contradict our expectations? Where do you find meaning in life? What are your aspirations and how they are shaping your life? How, not what, but how you want to be in the world and in relationship to others? At first, it sounds like the very things that bring us woes are the same things that bring us blessings, doesn't it? Well, but there is a difference. Look carefully at what Jesus is saying in these Beatitudes and their matching woes. What do all the blessings have in common? Seeking God. What do all the woes have in common? Seeking ourselves. I think the message is actually pretty simple: We are blessed when we seek God, regardless of our earthly circumstances, and we find woe whenever we are self-satisfied instead of God-hungry. When Jesus blesses the poor and

hungry, the sorrowful and the ridiculed, he isn't saying that we should all aspire to poverty, hunger, sorrow, or being verbally abused. He is saying that God is present with us, even when the world has abandoned us, that God loves us, even when everyone else hates us. As saints of God, then, we find blessing in seeking God, being hungry for God, loving those whom God loves, no matter what. That is what we remember and celebrate today on the Feast of All Saints. We remember and give thanks for those people who gave their life to God. Amen

The Rev'd Canon Dr Ishanesu Sextus Gusha
Chaplain