

Matthew 5:1-12
The Festival of All Saints
November 2, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus says, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This is such a beloved festival that, in some ways, the anticipation for All Saints Day may remind us of the anticipation for Easter Sunday – a festive glory focused on life everlasting, wonderful hymnody, everything adorned in white. There does seem to be quite a similarity, so that perhaps All Saints *is* like the Easter of *this half* of the year. But there's a very important distinction. The Easter festival proclaims our body's resurrection with Christ; The All Saints' festival proclaims our soul's *rest* with Christ.

That word 'rest' is so important for us, for – as Jesus himself tells his disciples in the upper room – "In this world, you will have tribulation" ... likewise, John's vision in Revelation proclaims, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation." That life of tribulation yearns for rest, doesn't it?

That's an inherent part of the theology of the cross. The theology of the cross is not merely that Christ has borne the cross of *salvation* for us (though, that certainly is the heart and foundation of it), but also that we ought expect to bear our crosses of

sanctification... to wrestle against our own sins, to fend off the slings and arrows of the devil, to bear the sins of others, the scabs they build up, the scars they leave. From all that, we yearn to rest from our labors.

So, there's the distinction between Easter and All Saints: Easter promises – in *Christ's* resurrection – our *own* resurrection and the *body's* victory over death. All Saints promises the *soul's* rest. Think of the beloved hymns of the day: “By all your saints in warfare, for all your saints *at rest*.” Again, “For all the saints who from their labors rest.” Again, in that beloved hymn, *Behold a Host Arrayed in White*: “They now enjoy the Sabbath *rest*, The heavenly banquet of the blest.” Again, “Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blest, the promise of salvation, the place of peace and *rest*.” Again, “Oh, what their joy and their glory must be, those endless Sabbaths the blessed ones see! Crowns for the valiant, to weary ones *rest*.”

Now, that last hymn reference ties us into this... for they in the Church Triumphant may have *endless* Sabbaths with the Lamb, but we in the Church militant are commanded by our Lord to remember that we for ourselves have this *same* rest in Christ (not just as a future inheritance, but a present blessing) ...He has planned for us a *regular* (even if momentary) share in this rest known endlessly by the Church Triumphant. “Remember the Sabbath, by keeping it holy.” It is in and of itself holy, and each Lord's Day, the Lord gathers his Church Militant to join in the rest of the Church

Triumphant... a *momentary* joining, a *day* of rest... yet, true rest in His Word, in His Sacraments, to be forgiven, strengthened, and sustained for another week of sojourning.

In other words, each Lord's Day it can be said of the Church Militant *just as truly* as it can be said of the Church Triumphant: "They now enjoy the Sabbath rest, the heavenly banquet of the blest." That is *yours* each Lord's Day, just as surely as it belongs to your loved ones who have gone before you in the Faith, whose souls endlessly gather (as the hymn says), "around the throne of David, the saints from care released." And, what do they do? – "Raise loud the songs of triumph to celebrate the feast." Yes, the saints from care released – the whole Church Triumphant – gather before the throne of God with the Lamb in the midst of them.

Consider not just what the sight of the gathered host must mean for *their* comfort, but also what that the Scripture's description of that sight ought mean for *your* comfort.

In the midst is the Lamb; that is the heart of everything. The Church is never without her Husband. And in the safety of being with Him, even where two or three were gathered, what joy! Yet, John's vision is not wrong to spend time gawking at the innumerable host gathered around the Lamb.

Consider the numerical reality of the Church. When we annually remember those who have gone before us, just as we will momentarily commemorate, we often assume that the *great*

number of mourners remember the *few* we have lost. In truth, the few we commemorate today are not the few, but have now joined a far *greater* host than they have ever known: *generations* of the Church Triumphant – Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Peter, Matthew, James, Paul, John, Mary, Lydia, Phoebe... down to Athanasius, Augustine, Cyril, Luther, Chemnitz, Walther, and all the *unsung* saints even down to this generation... all of those Christians of the Church Triumphant far outnumber the Christians who today sojourn as the Church militant in the great tribulation.

Thus, those we remember are not the ‘dead and gone,’ but the living (for “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” Jesus says)... the great living host and cloud of witnesses that surrounds us and whose eternal rest encourages us onward, so that we in the Church militant can press on with eager anticipation of joining the greater portion of the Church at rest.

And *you*, weary in the sojourn, *you* are blessed by Christ to gather with them each Lord’s Day, to share in the songs of triumph, and to celebrate the feast... that sacramental gift from Christ to you being His own body and blood that gives you a first-taste with the Church Triumphant, indeed, *more* than that, a first-taste of the *resurrection*, for His own body and blood are the firstfruits of not *just* eternal rest, but the resurrection, so that you already *taste* of it and may *confess* it, even as such a rich gift prepares you in body and soul *for* it... prepares your body for its resurrection, prepares your soul for

its rest. And thus, already in this life, we baptismally live and breathe that desire for divine rest.

What does that look like *today*? Our desire for divine rest *this* side of heaven is a desire for a clear conscience before God. How can I rest at His table, at His side, if I do not have a clear conscience before Him? And, though *chiefly* we desire a clear conscience before God, is not our rest also *hindered* by or *encouraged* by either a *burdened* or *clear* conscience of Christian love with one another? Is not this the great goal and pursuit of the baptismal life of repentance and forgiveness to which the parables of the last few months have repeatedly pointed us?

And all of *that* is couched in the words of the Beatitudes in our Gospel Reading. You know those words well; but do you interpret them materialistically – to be judged by the outcomes of the world – or do you interpret those Beatitudes baptismally (if you will), to be judged by the outcome of your *hope in Christ* and your desire for a clear conscience before God and fervent love for one another? Hear them again:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” – not the materialistically impoverished, but those humble to see the poverty of their righteousness... blessed are they, for – in Christ their righteousness – theirs “is”, Jesus says (even at this hour, He hints) the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn” – is that those who mourn merely at their temporal loss, grieving over riches slipping through their fingers or grieving over loved ones who only live for this life and now, in death, become to you merely a fading memory? Or is it those who mourn because they see what sin does, how the wages of sin is death, but in Christ Jesus the gift of God is eternal life, so that you who mourn will be comforted when not only the soul rests, but the body is resurrected and death itself dies?

“Blessed are the meek” – is that a humility of wealth and lower-class status *now* so that I can inherit the riches of earthly kingdoms *later*? Or is it the meekness and humility to recognize the log in my own eye and to bow my head before the Lord’s call to repentance with certainty that he will not only *forgive* me but will exalt me with my fellow Christians and grant me a full share of his inheritance, including the new creation?

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?” – is that those who hunger and thirst for the blood of their enemies, vengeance and vindication at all costs? Or is it those who hunger and thirst for Christ, his salvation, his forgiveness... certainly for you, but also for your brother and sister in Christ... and even for all those who live in darkness, that they may be brought out of the shadows and into the light of Christ’s love.

“Blessed are the merciful... blessed are the pure in heart... blessed are the peacemakers” – is that a temporal worldly

peacemaking for a just-out-of-reach utopian serenity? Or is that true Christian love of neighbor, a patient and lowly heart toward one another, mutual joy in the forgiveness of sins and Christ's peace which the world cannot give?

Lastly, "blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" – is that a call to temporal, political steadfastness? Or is that a call to steadfastness in our eternal hope in Christ Jesus, that we – baptismally clothed in the Only-Begotten of the Father – we may, through *him*, also be called *sons* of God?

And that is what we are. Isn't that how John's epistle says it? – "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called *children of God*. The reason why the world does not know *us* (why it doesn't *recognize* us as the sons of God) is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are *God's* children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him" (like Christ, like "*the* Son of God," because we are adopted "sons of God").

Notice that, as John comforts his hearers, he points them not *merely* to eternal rest, but to *the resurrection*: "What we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him." Notice, that forward-thinking. That's true not just of the Church *militant*, but also of the Church *Triumphant*: "How long, O Lord?" the saints cry... not in agony, but in eager anticipation. Again, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus" cries the Church at the conclusion of

Revelation (not just on earth, but also in heaven... for there is only *one* Church).

In other words, the ‘longing for rest everlasting’ is not the *finality* of our hope. Our “goal,” if you will, is not some eternal blissful sleep or to simply forever “rest in peace.” The very phrase “rest in peace,” the very words “rest” and “sleep” imply an awakening, a rising from that rest. For God did not create our bodies to simply lay lifeless forever, but to *live* forever. And, thus, the All Saints festival *bends the knee*, if you will, to Easter... which is to say, All Saints ushers in the final Sundays of the church year, as we eagerly anticipate the glorious return of the incarnate God-man, revealed anew to sight, when He will vindicate those who hoped in Him and waited for Him, those He even today sustains with His resurrected and holy body and blood, that ‘Church militant’ may gather with ‘Church triumphant’ and partake of this hour of heavenly rest, as we continue the sojourn... already in possession of the great inheritance – that ours is the kingdom of heaven.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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