

Text: Luke 6:20-31

Happy All Hallow's Sunday! Otherwise known as All Saints, which we observe today.

I hope you all had a good Halloween. I heard about one boy who came to a neighbor's house to trick or treat but he was just wearing his regular clothes. The neighbor asked him what he was, and he said, "A werewolf." She responded, "But you're not wearing costume." And he said, "Yeah, well, it's not a full moon yet, is it?"

Today we have the opportunity to reflect on this wonderful feast day in the Church – All Saints, All Hallow's, and be reminded of our calling as saints in this world even as we celebrate our belief in life after death, of resurrection - to proclaim that we are indeed surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses – of those who have died before us in the Lord.

People often ask me what the Episcopal Church thinks about saints. I usually tell them that "we like them." Of course, we do have a liturgical calendar to honor holy men and women whose lives inspire us to greater holiness, and so even though we don't have a formal canonization process as in the Roman or Orthodox church, we do have a democratic one. To be on our saint calendar you need to be nominated and we will vote on you at General Convention, and if a compelling case has been made, your name will be assigned to a day in our calendar. So the saints on our calendar include people like the apostles, and St. Mary, St. Theresa, St. Bridget, St. Francis, St. Augustine, etc., but we also have people like Martin Luther King Jr., Evelyn Underhill, Oscar Romero, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and CS Lewis on it. So our concept of those we include among the saints is much broader than in some traditions. Our book of Lesser Feasts and Fasts describes the saints in this way: ***"In the saints we are not dealing primarily with absolutes of perfection but human lives, in all their diversity, open to the motions of the Holy Spirit. Many a holy life, when carefully examined, will reveal flaws or the bias of a particular moment...:"***

Attitudes...that may appear to be defective and wrong....It should encourage us to realize that the saints, like us, are first and foremost redeemed sinners in whom the risen Christ's words to St. Paul come to fulfillment: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

In other words, as Oscar Wilde put it, ***'Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future.'*** So yes, we are all called to be saints. Or as our hymn #293 (that we'll sing later at 10am) describes it:

The world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus' will. You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store, in church, by the sea, in the house next door; they are saints of God, whether rich or poor, and I mean to be one too.

So what does it look like to live the life of a saint? Our Gospel lesson today shows us. Our text is the Sermon on the Mount and is what Richard Rohr has called, the "blueprint for the Christian lifestyle and a summary of Jesus' wisdom teachings." But this sermon has often confused people...what could Jesus mean when he says, "Blessed are you who are poor" or "who weep" or "who are hungry"? Please understand that he is not, as I've mentioned before, making proscriptive statements here – Jesus is making descriptive statements – these are not how to statements, they are descriptions of people upon whom God's favor already rests. The concept of being blessed means – as Mary described in the Magnificat – to be "favored by God." And so Jesus is revealing here that God's favor and merciful love rests on those who are struggling and suffering in body, mind, or spirit...this sermon is a reminder that we are not alone in our struggles, that God loves us even then and that suffering DOES NOT mean God is punishing you, as has so often incorrectly been taught. Jesus wants you - you broken hearted, you downtrodden, you poor, you lonely, you hungry, you hurting, to know, once and for all that God loves you despite any appearances to the contrary.

The Sermon on the Mount also reveals that if we are too full and satisfied with the goods of the world in this life, without God, then we will lose out. St. Augustine said it this way: "God is always trying to give good things to us, but **our hands** are too **full** to receive them."

And so Jesus teaches us here to recognize and even embrace our emptiness, our needs, our hungers and our hurts- as the very means by which we are and can be drawn closer to God's heart and experience the love and favor God has for us. Our emptiness, our pain, our loneliness, our hungers are meant to be filled by God and God alone.

So if we are to be saints, our task is simple: be open and ready to be filled and moved by the Holy Spirit. Because when there is room for God's Spirit to fill our hearts – then we *can* love all people- even our enemies as Jesus tells us here, with a fierce and holy love that destroys enmity between people through the power of love, not force. Notice that we do not need to like our enemies, or excuse them, or tolerate them, but we must love them, and may include calling them to account, and we do it because God loves them.

There was a 90 year old saint in my parish in St. Louis, known to be a woman of prayer who never minced words. And, whenever anyone, including myself, began to complain about someone or vent frustrations about a particularly difficult person, she would simply say in a very dry tone, "And God loves him too." And so of course, it would cause us to stop and reframe. That's the Sermon on the Mount in a nutshell.

So my friends - no matter your past or present, you have a future and you have been called into the way of love by God's grace. Allow God, and God alone, to fill the empty places in your heart with love, and in so doing, find that you too, are a saint.

Amen.