

Solemnity of All Saints
November 1, 2009
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Instructions for Sainthood

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14
Psalm 24
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12a

Life is full of instructions. Some instructions are obvious, others are not. The instructions that I found on a packet of peanuts during an American Airlines flight were pretty obvious, “Open packet, eat nuts.” Yet, the instructions that I read about on the internet regarding a Swedish chain saw seemed quite helpful—“Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands or genitals.” The instructions on a bottle of ketchup at a restaurant seemed too obvious, “Put on food,” while I appreciate the instructions on the Nytol Sleep Aid, “Warning: May cause drowsiness.” Usually, the instructions that are the least obvious are the most helpful. This is definitely the case regarding the instructions Jesus gives us in the Beatitudes.

Because we have all heard the Beatitudes numerous times, it’s easy for us to forget the amazing implications these instructions have for us; how they call us out of the ways of the world and into sainthood. Since the Solemnity of All Saints invites us to reflect upon God’s call for *every one of us* to be saints, I thought we’d walk through a few of the Beatitudes and some of the implications that these instructions have for saintliness.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

The spirit of the world teaches us to fear not having enough. We fear not having enough money, possessions, friends, love, respect, power, good health... the list could go on and on. Because we fear not having enough of these things, we tend to cling to the little we have and then pretend we are in control of it. The first Beatitude is about letting go of these things, not so much with our hands, but with our hearts. To truly possess the kingdom of heaven means *detaching* ourselves from the things of the earth, including fear and the pretense that we control things.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola expressed this attitude of detachment and poverty beautifully in the principle and foundation of his Spiritual Exercises when he wrote—

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance
before all...created gifts....
We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,
wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or short one.
For everything has the potential of calling
forth in us a deeper response to our life in God.
-paraphrased by David L Fleming SJ

To be “poor in spirit” is a radical call to detach ourselves from created things in a way that gives glory to the Creator of all things. It means that we see *everything* in life as an opportunity from God to grow closer to Him. One of the important steps in such radical detachment is grieving the loss of the things we love.

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

Of all the Beatitudes, this one probably makes the least amount of sense to most of us. Our culture in the United States does not promote mourning and grieving. In fact, we tend to be irritated by people who mourn longer or more profoundly than we think they should. Because of this, many of us have repressed grief. We haven't properly mourned the death of loved ones, the loss of jobs, security, peace; we haven't properly mourned the loss of good health, autonomy, independence and countless other things. So, we often just get angry about these losses and wonder why God won't comfort us.

Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians explains to us that there will always be some loss for us to grieve in this world because “the world in its present form is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31b). This Beatitude reminds us that we must be willing to get *into* the grief we're experiencing and share it with God. Contrary to the world's message of avoiding anything painful, when we are willing to mourn our losses, especially in prayer, then we experience the comfort and consolation of God that is promised to us by Jesus in this Beatitude.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.” (Matthew 5:5)

This Beatitude, which is not found in the list of Beatitudes in the Gospel of Luke, is actually a continuation of the message of the first two Beatitudes. The Jews who heard it would have known immediately recognized it as coming from Psalm 37:11, “But the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” The word used for “meek” in Psalm 37:11 is the Hebrew word *anawim*, which can also be translated “poor.”¹ And so, like the first two Beatitudes, this one is inviting us to embrace poverty and detachment for the sake of something greater, ultimately heaven.

The Solemnity of All Saints reminds us that we are called to be saints and the Beatitudes provide some instructions on how that can happen. Let's pray this week that the lives of the saints, as well as Jesus' Beatitudes, will give us new encouragement and zeal to be the saints God created us to be!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Spending some time in prayer, reflecting on the Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew 5:3-10. Which one of the Beatitudes do you feel God most desires to work on with you right now in your life?
- ✚ Write your own sermon for the last five Beatitudes (the ones not covered in this homily), pointing out the difference between the world's view and Jesus' view.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.

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

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

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

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹ The New American Bible translation of this passage reads, “But the *poor* will possess the land, will delight in great prosperity” (*emphasis mine*).