

ALL SAINTS

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

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

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

REFLECTION 1:

‘THE SERVANTS OF OUR GOD

In the year 610 AD, the Roman Emperor Phorcus handed over the title deeds of a large building in Rome to Pope Boniface IV. This large edifice had in fact been constructed 25 years before Christ by the Emperor Hadrian and was known as the Pantheon (not to be confused with the Parthenon, which is in Athens, Greece, a classical masterpiece of architecture at the heart of the Acropolis). Originally the Pantheon was a temple dedicated to all the pagan gods of Rome. Subsequently, Pope Boniface dedicated the structure to our Blessed Mother and to all the martyrs. Later on this dedication was extended to all saints, confessors, virgins, martyrs, and in fact to all holy men and women who had passed on. It was surely fitting that a temple once dedicated to all pagan gods should now be dedicated to All Saints. Today’s Feast of All Saints is a reminder to us of that day of dedication, so many years ago. I visited this massive oval shaped building in 1975. In fact it is one of the best-preserved buildings of the ancient world. One of the first things you notice about the structure is that it has no windows; light comes through an opening in the ceiling. This aperture lights up the whole structure and casts no shadows.

I believe that we have an important message from today’s celebration, especially in relation to the Pantheon, which has such close associations with today’s Feast of All Saints. As human beings, we are made up of flesh and blood and at Baptism we were consecrated to Christ. As St. Paul expressed it, ‘you were once earthly and of flesh, but now in baptism you have been clothed in Christ’ (Romans 6:4). The saints were those who believed this fact with great conviction, they were indeed, ‘clothed in Christ’. And they lived out their lives accordingly. We may not be in a position to imitate them or even to utter their sentiments, but we can nevertheless live out our lives by the fundamental principles that governed them. Like the stones of the Pantheon, their lives as well as ours were given over to the cult of paganism. But then the change came. Something extraordinary happened, the Spirit of Jesus entered and they began to live out the Beatitudes we read about in today’s Gospel. They were poor in spirit, yet always gentle. They were merciful, peacemakers – they hungered for justice, and right living. Now their reward is great in heaven. There was found in them, a rededication, a turning from the old ways to a new and fresh vision on how to live. We should ‘rejoice and be glad’ for our reward will be great in heaven.

REFLECTION 2:

A NON-SECULAR CHARTER

The story is told about two dogs that were walking down the road discussing why one of them was wearing a collar. The collared dog explained, 'I think it's to amplify my barking!' When we talk about the Beatitudes those who proclaim the word of God don't need to wear a collar in order to make their message louder. On their own, the eight Beatitudes at the heart of today's Gospel, amplify one thing, God's tremendous love for each and every one of us. Indeed, we are blessed to be children of a loving God who takes care of all our needs.

All the readings for today, the Feast of All Saints focus on our status as children of God. The Responsorial Psalm, linking the first and second reading echoes to the words 'Such are those who seek your face O Lord'. Jesus invites all his followers to embrace values and lifestyles that are essential in making the reign of God real and practical in our everyday lives. Available on the bookshelves is a volume entitled 'How to succeed in business' and were the author to advocate the principles outlined in the Beatitudes, the critics would rubbish him. Why, one may very well ask? Well, the truth is that the Beatitudes go counter to the typical manner of thinking, advocated by the culture and secularism in today's world. The Beatitudes seem so unrealistic and foreign to so many that some might say that Jesus got it wrong! And yet, these are the very values essential for all who aspire to be the Lord's disciples.

The first reading from the Book of the Apocalypse envisages the joy and ultimate victory of those who have lived lives of fidelity and trust in God, lives conformed to the Beatitudes. They are the victorious ones, dressed in white robes and carrying palm branches, clear indications of those who have triumphed over forces alien to God.

The readings today help us to realise the significance of the Feast of All Souls (2nd Nov.) that dovetails with today's Feast of All Saints. There we commemorate all the faithful departed, who died with hope and trust in a living God. The saints, models of Christian living are at home with God now – 'may God's household be enhanced by their presence' (Irish prayer). We look to them for strength and guidance as we continue our struggle in life until we are united with them once more. Death does not sever any of the bonds that unite us with the Holy One. We believe that those who have died continue to be allied to us, concerned about us as we are for them. That is why it is fitting for us to pray for the dead and to ask them to pray for us.

This month is the opportune time to reflect on our relationship with those who have gone before us 'marked with the sign of faith'. As children of God, here on earth and beyond this life, we are called to live in fidelity to God's values, in trust that our living God journeys with us now and always.