

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sin for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. And Peace: peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the fifth chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

***And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. <sup>2</sup> Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the***

***peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

I wonder how many people read this portion of Scripture and say something like, "Yeah... what Jesus said. I am a blessed one." But they neglect to look at what the text actually says. In the Beatitudes Christ is not patting His disciples and those listening to Him on the back, instead Christ is telling them, in no uncertain terms, that life is going to be hard. There is nothing easy about the life that we

have lived up to this point and there is nothing easy about the rest of the life that we are going to live.

In fact about this text Kretzmann notes, “*the Sermon on the Mount is not the proclamation of the Gospel, but preaching of the Law. To awaken and promote the realization and the sense, not only of comparative weakness and insufficiency in spiritual matters, but of a total and utter inability to think and speak and act in conformity with the holy will of God; to bring about the humiliating, but incidentally the most blessed conviction as to one’s being wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked in spiritual things; and to teach the regenerated that without Him we can do nothing, and thus lead them on the way of true sanctification; that was the object of Christ in delivering this wonderful sermon.*” And I wonder how many of us have read this sermon this way. How many of us look at the Beatitudes and think, “Wow! I really am a horrible sinner!” My introduction to this thought was from a former pastor who informed me that instead of Jesus saying, “Good Job,” rather He was saying, “Do you do

this? No... oh well, do you do this? No... oh...” And this is a pretty damning thought. Christ’s beatitudes are not a laundry list of things we excel at, but rather a laundry list of our many failings.

And yet, as Kretzmann points out and as we know, with faith in Jesus Christ and in all that He has done for us, we can do the good works, we can look at the beatitudes as a blessed reminder of how much we have to work on... not to get into heaven but to be faithful Christians here on earth. Jesus gets us into heaven, Jesus has redeemed us, Jesus has done everything that we cannot... Because of Jesus we, and all Christians, are ...***blessed!***

Now looking at the Beatitudes, let’s take a peek and see just how many of them we think can apply to us. Of course we will not look at all of them, because we know that we will see too many failings if we look at them all, but what about a couple of them.

Starting at the first: Blessed are the poor in spirit. I don’t know about you but apart from

Christ I know that I am in shambles, but is that what my old Adam tells me? Does my old Adam want me to believe that I cower from my sins... or rather does it encourage them? Am I 'poor' in the sense that I know very intimately the things needed by my soul? Am I poor in that I know that my dependency is on another and not on myself? Am I poor in spirit when I abandon God and try to do things my own way?

I would like to think that some of us can say, "Of course I'm poor in spirit, I know my sins and they are glaring before me." However, we make statements like that and we are lying. We make statements like that and yet five minutes later we go right back to sinning. Instead of staying 'poor in spirit' and focusing on the things of God, we go right back to thinking about ourselves. Instead of being poor... we are prideful and rather rich in our own spirit. We set out to fulfill the wants and desires of our old Adam and we ignore those things that God would have us do.

And yet, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. If we are not poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is not ours. When we sin against God, when we do not show our utter poverty in all things and our utter reliance on Him alone, we are not poor in spirit... and ultimately the kingdom of heaven is not ours.

Blessed are the meek... how about this, all those who think they are meek stand up. Those who think that they are the meek, the ones who are small and insignificant, stand up... or is that showing how not meek we are. Just like being poor in spirit, how can we even attempt to be meek by ourselves? As one commentator notes, "*To suffer and to bear uncomplainingly is their characteristic; there is no obstinate arrogance in their behavior.*" Does that describe you?

When Christ stands up before you and shows you His hands and His feet, when He points out that His life was a life of sorrow and pain, when He explains that He lived His entire life for you so that you could have heaven... are you going to then tell Christ just how meek you are?

Blessed are the pure in heart... Nope.  
Blessed are the peacemakers... How about here? Do we consider ourselves peacemakers? As one commentator notes, *“The disciples of Jesus are children of peace... they are active strenuous promoters of peace in the midst of a world torn asunder by hatred, party interest, and every form of alienation.”* Would you say that this describes you?

Are you a peacemaker amongst your family, or are you an instigator at times? Do you actively seek peace with those who disagree with you about something as, reasonably, trivial as politics? Do you actively seek peace with those who are persecuting your church? Do you seek peace with your enemies? And yet, Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the Sons of God.”

So far, we see that we are not poor in spirit, we are not meek, we are not pure in heart, and we are not peacemakers... now do you understand why we don't have to look at all of them? Now do you see why when this portion of Scripture

is read each and every one of us should cringe and pull back? We read this portion of Scripture, and I would bet at times think, “Yeah.. this sounds like me.” But when we stop and really examine ourselves in conjunction with the words being spoken by Jesus Christ... then we really see our deficiencies.

Today we are celebrating All Saints Sunday. It is the day of the church year when we look at all the saints and thank God for those people who have come before us and have given us a great example of the faith. It is a day when we turn to God and mourn over our own sin and deficiency and ask God to help us... help us on our own path to Him.

And God did help us. God sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world to give us teachings, like we have today, and to help us realize just how sinful we are. God sent His Son Jesus Christ to us to live a perfect life. Being meek, being pure in heart, being a peacemaker. Jesus was perfect, living a life of perfect fulfillment of the law for each and every one of us. Jesus then was taken at night, beaten, falsely tried, found guilty, and

was then hung on a cross. Jesus was the perfect, spotless, blameless, Son of God and for this He had to hang on a cross because people could not bear Him and His teaching anymore. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus rose to proclaim that His life and death were acceptable to His Father for the remission of all of our sins. For if Jesus did not live, die, and rise from the dead for us... then our hope, our faith is in vain.

And now that we know Jesus is risen, now that we, by faith, trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation... now we can begin to fulfill the Law. Not to earn us a spot in heaven, but to show our love and appreciation for our God.

Through faith in Christ, we can know that we are poor in spirit. We can recognize our poor spiritual life and come to mourn that. We can see just how unmeek we are, and we can ask that God would help us to recognize our sin and thus aid us in becoming all the more meek as our lives continue. We can become pure in heart, not by ourselves, but through faith in all that Jesus has done for us. We can be a

peacemaker. Though it can be difficult, we can remember all that Jesus has done for us, His enemies, and we can remember what Jesus did on the cross: not fighting back, but still preaching the Gospel of God's grace (Father forgive them) and God's love to all those who were nailing Him to that cross.

When we know Jesus, when we have faith, faith which God gives us in His Means of Grace and there strengthens them... through faith in Jesus then we can look at the Beatitudes and say, "I am not perfect... but Jesus was and for His sake these Beatitudes are mine also."

As our Apology states, "*Christ often connects the promise of the remission of sins to good works, not because He means that good works are a propitiation, for they follow reconciliation, but for two reasons. One is, because good fruits must necessarily follow... The other reason is, because we have need of external signs of so great a promise, because a conscience full of fear has need of manifold consolation.*"

And so it is, on All Saints Sunday, we want to thank God for the faith that He has given to all who have died before us and those who will die with us and after us. On this earth we live as, *simul justus et peccator*, both sinner and saint. And when our lives are over, through faith in Jesus Christ, we know that we have heaven waiting for us. As Gerhard notes, “*We, too, must also tread in their holy and blessed footsteps, and in keeping with their example we must bear with patience the tribulations of this life, so that along with them we become partakers of the rich reward of heaven.*”

Dear friends in Christ, blessed are all of God’s children. They are the ones who have faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation and they are the ones who know their own sinfulness and rely completely on Jesus for all things in this life and in the next. God has given us so much and we can know that we are blessed. We are blessed, not because we deserve it, but because it is His gift to us.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you

falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. This is the promise of God that we can hold onto. God has promised that we will be blessed, that we are blessed and because of Him and His Son, we know that heaven will be all the sweeter than this life.

Thanks be to God who has blessed us so richly.  
Amen.