

Every third year on All Saints' Sunday we hear Luke's version of the Beatitudes—and they're so Lukan! In the Gospel of Matthew these blessings are part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and there are more of them: blessed are the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. The ones they have in common are spiritualized, more metaphorical: Blessed are the poor *in spirit*; Matthew says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*. In Luke's account, Jesus doesn't pull any punches: Blessed are you who are poor, who weep, who are hungry; you will be filled, you will laugh, yours is the kingdom of God. And then there's the woes! In Matthew they come much later and are reserved for the hypocrites, but here Jesus doesn't make those distinctions. He delivers the bad news right on the heels of the good news: the full will be hungry, the laughing will weep, the rich, as his mother sang, will be sent away empty. And finally, in Luke it's not the Sermon on the Mount. "He came down with them," Luke says just before today's reading, "and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon."

I love this scene—sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain—everyone there together, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, hungry and full, weeping and laughing, the well-thought-of and the hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed. And Jesus goes even further, telling them, telling all of us willing to listen, to love each other, to bless and pray for our enemies, to give to everyone who asks, to do to others—even *those others*—as we would have them do to us. A few verses later, after today's reading ends, he tells them why: to be children of the Most High, who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, Jesus says, as God is merciful.

Well good for God, we might be thinking. For humans, it's hard enough to tolerate, let alone love, our enemies. If someone strikes us on the cheek, or takes away our coat, we'll probably call the police. But today is for remembering that there have been, and are still, people whose goodness, kindness, mercy, generosity, seem to transcend the merely human, reaching a level we associate with divinity. And All Saints Day isn't just about admiring these holy ones from a distance, either. This last principal feast of the church year is for reminding us that what's possible for them is possible for us. In our Collect we prayed for grace to follow the capital-S saints in godly living, that we might share their joy. But right now, whether we're rich or poor, hungry or full, laughing or weeping, kind and merciful or ungrateful and wicked, we are part of the communion of saints. So are those "little-s" saints whose names we said a few minutes ago. That scene of the Sermon on the Plain is a glimpse, a foretaste of that holy fellowship, God's family across time and space, the living and the dead, those we love and those we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.

We're bound together in this communion by sacrament, those signs of grace that make the invisible visible. We light the Paschal Candle on All Saints Day—whether or not we are

celebrating a baptism—to remind us of that binding, our shared participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s dying, rising, and ascending, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The small church where I served as seminarian had a portable baptismal font that we’d roll out into the Memorial Garden on nice days to make that connection plain, that we and all those who have come before us and will come after us are baptized into Christ’s death and continue forever in his risen life. We do something similar in every Eucharist, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, when we recall, or in Rite I have in remembrance, Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension as we offer the gifts. The fancy Greek word for that re-remembering is *anamnesis*, which literally means “against amnesia.” If you were at the Easter Vigil this year you might remember my sharing that a priest celebrating the Eucharist in American Sign Language would indicate remembrance by reaching forward and backward, the past and future somehow brought together in the present.

And we’re bound together in the communion of saints by prayer. People from other traditions sometimes think that Catholics and Anglicans pray to the saints, but even in the most high-church litanies invoking these holy ones by name, the refrain is “pray *for* us.” I’ve always loved the line in the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth” thanking God for “friends on earth and friends above.” Just as we might ask earthly friends, and our church community, to pray for a particular need or intention, we can ask those friends above to put in a good word. And by story and tradition they all have their areas of expertise: on a very helpful Wikipedia page entitled “List of patron saints by occupation and activity,” I discovered that St. Gregory the Great is the patron saint of teachers, St. Martin, as you probably know, looks out for soldiers, and St. Mary Magdalene, I’ll bet you didn’t know, specializes in hairdressers and pharmacists. It’s a little silly, but also comforting. When my daughter Mary thought she had some packages stolen this past week, including one I sent her for Halloween, I told her I’d take it up with St. Anthony—and they turned up! “Community is the antidote to isolation,” Cathy said last Sunday. “When we seek and participate in community, we are no longer isolated, and we come into the nearer presence of God.”

So finally, we are bound together in the communion of saints by praise, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven. Worship, especially in this thin time of All Hallows, is a bridge between the worlds, a liminal space between heaven and earth. In churches with more visuals, particularly in the Orthodox tradition of icons, our fellow praisers would be depicted all around us, but even here when we mostly look out Sister Trees and Brother Squirrel, they’re here. We are surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses, showing us the way, cheering us on as we grow in goodness, kindness, mercy, and generosity. The more we love, the more we hope, the more we freely give, the more we are like the One who made us.

Let us pray: Praise you Source of all Love, surrounded by those who have uncommonly loved and rest now from their labors. Hallowed be for the light they left behind that continues to blaze here and sparks generations of little lights, making all the difference in this dark world. Praise you that your love can never be put out. Amen. (Tess Ward, *The Celtic Wheel of the Year*)