

YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

THE HOLY GOSPEL

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY NOVEMBER 6, 2011



The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew the Fifth Chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. {2} Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: {3} "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {4} "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. {5} "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. {6} "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will

be filled. {7} "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. {8} "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. {9} "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. {10} "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {11} "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. {12} Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon - November 6, 2011

Year A - Year of Matthew - All Saints Sunday

Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

One of the parts of All Saints Sunday is that we come together to remember all those who have gone before us. We recall those who have died in the faith and salvation won for us by Christ and his cross. Part of today is holding up the words of Saint Paul, "If we live we live to the Lord, and if we die we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

That word from Saint Paul is the fundamental and absolute word of scripture. As once was said, "God is the One from whom we came and the One to whom we shall return."

Coming and returning is the absolute truth of who we are. We are people whose lives come from God and return to him. We come from God and return to God, and God is all around us from beginning to the end.

A long time ago, I attended a church not far from my apartment. This church loved processions. Every Sunday at the entrance hymn, the acolytes, choir, and pastor would all process down the center isle behind a processional cross. They wore white surplices and sometimes entered the sanctuary carrying banners. At that moment, anyone there knew that this was church with a capital C. It was a way of saying, "We are not here to limp through this worship. We are here to announce that whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." Then, during the communion, as the congregation came forward for the Sacrament, hymns would be sung, the choir would sing, and a bell choir would play. They were a procession of God's people, coming forward to receive the true Body and Blood of Jesus who won the victory of life and heaven for us.

As the people went up to the altar and back, it was a procession of young and old, well-dressed and ill dressed, polished shoes and scuffed shoes. They came to receive the true Body of Christ, and as they did, they were surrounded by music and song that was meant to remind them that they were surrounded by the heavenly promise.

That procession by the people to the altar was like a living way of saying what was read today in First John, "See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." The processions in that church spoke something of eternity, and the communion of saints, and the body of Christ. We are all a part of the Body of Christ. We are all part of the coming and returning. It is the procession of our faith in the God from whom we are given life and to whom we return.

In John's Gospel, there a story about Martha and Jesus that speaks about what we observe on All Saints Day. At the time of the death of her brother Lazarus, Martha was perhaps angry with Jesus. While her sister and other friends and relations mourned the death of Lazarus, Martha marched out to the edge of town and said to Jesus, "If you had come when we called you, my brother Lazarus would not be dead." She sounds angry to me in that line.

The death of someone we love can be like that. It does not matter if someone we miss died yesterday or twenty years ago. We miss them. It hurts. Things just are not the same. We can find ourselves saying, "If only, if only, if only..."

Jesus can take it. Jesus is with Martha, and is always with us when we are feeling separated from those we love and miss. Jesus is ready to transform our grief into faith and into promise. "Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead?" Jesus asked Martha. "Oh, yes," Martha replies, "we all know that at the last day, at the end of time, when the new age dawns, God shall raise the dead." "Martha, I am the resurrection. Do you believe this?" "Yes," Martha answered; and she meant it.

In fact, Martha became the first person in John's gospel to proclaim that "yes," Jesus is the Christ, and even as they speak, she knows her brother lives.

The promise of Easter, our faith, and All Saints is this: Right now they are with God in Christ. They are in the light of the Lamb! They are with God in Christ!

As we prepare to go to the altar to receive the true Body and Blood of Jesus, we remember all of the souls in our lives that have died and are at the feet of Christ the Lamb. They are there just as we are at the foot of this altar. Each one of our brothers and sisters was a unique witness for Christ. Their death commended to the promise of Easter is calling us to make our witness to this faith, assurance, and resurrection as we come and return before this altar to receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation, Christ's Body and Blood.

Today, as we remember those who, like Martha, have gone on before us to meet with Jesus the Lamb of God, we also are to remember what God calls us to be unique witnesses for the Lord in this place. For whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's, who is the One from whom we come and the One to whom we shall return. Amen.