

## **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO DIE IN THE LORD!**

All Saint Sunday (6 November Anno Domini 2011)

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Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and from our Lord who is the Savior, Jesus the Christ,  
AMEN!

To the nine beatitudes of our Lord's Sermon On the Mount in this morning's Gospel, I will add a tenth from the book of the Revelation on this All Saints' Sunday:

*And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"* (Rev 14:13)

"Blessed", that's our word for the day. And a fitting word it is on All Saints' Day, the day we remember the martyrs of the faith together with our own blessed dead who have gone through the great tribulation of this life and death and have joined ranks of that great multitude that no one can number from every tribe, nation, people, and language. "Blessed."

The Greek word for blessed is μακάριος (mak-ar-ee-os). I share it only to widen your hearing a bit beyond what you may think of term "blessed." When we say blessed, we usually think happy, healthy and wealthy, or fortunate as we "count our blessings" or consider how "blessed we are." And that certainly can be a part of that word makareeos. But there's more, of course. To be makareeos, blessed, is to be on the receiving end of God's good substance of God's gifts.

This way of blessing doesn't mesh with the way the world generally understands blessedness. Listen to God's way just a moment.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, the spiritual beggars, those who have nothing to offer God. Theirs is the kingdom of God."

"Blessed are those who mourn, who feel the pangs of death, who mourn the wages of sin, whose tears water the earth, for they will be comforted."

"Blessed are the meek, who present the other cheek to their enemies, who do good to those who hate them, whose strength is perfected in weakness, who trust the hidden power of the cross, for they shall inherit the earth."

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for a righteousness, who have no righteousness of their own, who long for something better than they can cook up on their own; they will be satisfied with a righteousness not their own, one that comes through trust in Christ and His righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful, who forgive those who sin against them, whose hearts are turned in compassion toward others regardless of reward; they shall receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure hearted, who have washed their hearts in the blood of the Lamb who was slain for them, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peace makers, who stand in the breach between warring parties, who reconcile instead of retaliate, for they shall be sons of God.

Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness' sake, who suffer of the sake of the kingdom, who confess Christ not to their gain but to their loss, whose lives reflect the Suffering Servant who laid down His life to save the world, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you, baptized believing ones. Blessed are you when others revile you, make fun of you, kick you, exclude you, insult you, slander you because you bear the name of Christ. Don't get mad, be joyful. You take your company with the prophets who came before you. It's not you they are insulting, it's Christ. And that's cause for rejoicing, because you and Christ are one. Your trust will be vindicated. Your reward is great in heaven.

Blessed, makareeos it certainly doesn't seem like the world's idea of "blessed," does it? Poor, mourning, meek, suffering, hungry, thirsty, merciful, pure hearted peacemaking, persecuted.

Where's the Cadillac Escalade, the vacation home, the Jacuzzi, the party life, the glamour, the notoriety? This is God's way of blessing - back handed, upside down, inside out, opposite, and so often hidden. Sometimes it's hidden from you but especially from the world.

To get the way of "blessed" right you have to get Jesus right. He alone embodies these things in Himself. You don't, nor do I. We are anything but meek and merciful, pure hearted and peacemakers. Not by nature. Not in ourselves. Christ alone is all of this. He embodies these beatitudes perfectly. He is poor in spirit. Though rich, He became poor so that by His poverty you are rich. He mourns, weeping over our sin, our rejection, our death, as He wept over Jerusalem and over the tomb of Lazarus, and in His mourning is found your comfort and joy. He hungers and thirsts for our righteousness, and out of His hunger, you are fed. He is merciful, pure-hearted, peacemaking, showing mercy by laying down His life for the world, making peace by His own blood, offering His pure life as the sacrifice for your sin. He is the persecuted One, falsely accused, falsely convicted, yet in His conviction you are acquitted, justified, declared righteous before God.

Jesus does the beatitudes to His own death, and baptized and believing in Him they become yours. You are "blessed" to the fullest extent in Jesus, and only as you understand and cling to that, will you understand what it means to be "blessed." Only in Jesus can hunger and thirst and persecution and mourning be called "blessing" and those who experience these things be called the "blessed."

Those beatitudes bring us to the one from the Revelation. ***"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth."*** Yes, you heard it correctly. Blessed are the dead. And not simply any dead, because all do indeed die! But blessed are those who die in the Lord. The Lord Jesus has gone the way ahead of them. He has gone to death and the grave, and those who follow Him, trusting Him, are called blessed in their death.

The wages of sin is death; make no mistake about it. Death is the ultimate consequence of sin. We die because of sin. There is nothing "blessed" about death itself. But Jesus has done something remarkable with Death. He has taken the wages of our sin, our biggest enemy, the thing we fear and dread the most, and He has made it a source of blessing. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

"From now on" refers to the time following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. The last days, the end times in which you and I live. Christ has conquered sin, death and the devil. Christ has gone into death and became Death's undoing. Like a fish swallowing a baited hook, Death swallowed up Jesus on the cross, but Jesus turned out to have the upper hand over Death and swallowed it up in His victory. Like the great fish that swallowed up Jonah and held him for three days, the Death could not hold Jesus but had to spit Him out alive.

The Spirit says those who die in the Lord rest from their labors. Their work is done, but their works are not forgotten. Their deeds do follow them. Take note. The deeds of blessed dead "follow them." They don't precede them, as though they needed their works to get into heaven. That would not be the way of the "poor in spirit." Instead, their deeds follow them like the long train of a bridal gown. All the works that God had done through them, all the fruit the Spirit bore in them, all the good that Jesus worked as fruitful branches joined to Him, follow them in all their shining glory.

In the reading from the Revelation, John is privileged to see heaven's side of things. Not the suffering that we see, but the glory, the triumph, the life that is ours in Jesus. He sees a great multitude, a crowd no one can number, what we refer to as "all the company of heaven." They are wearing robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. They are baptized in blood and wear their baptismal robes as their righteousness before God. As we contemplate on our faithful departed, and remember also those we love who have died in the Lord, bring this image of the Revelation to mind. They are there in that multitude.

And listen to how it is with them: ***They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple, and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.***

They are, in today's word, "blessed." And you are too, in the same word, by the same Baptism, in the same faith, "blessed" in Jesus. For Jesus came to give life eternal life and that life has already started for you! For in Jesus Christ all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, forgiven by the blood of the Lamb. In Jesus name, Amen and amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus, AMEN!