

Sermon for the Festival of All Saints 2004
Sunday, 4.xi.2004, 10:00, Holy Eucharist – ELW 5
Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Bregue, Pennsylvania

Jesu Juva!

**Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.**

**But the saints of the Most High shall
receive the kingdom and possess the
kingdom forever, forever and ever.'—
Daniel 7:18**

**‘The Beatitudes’ are hard learning for Christians.
They are hard because there are two versions of them, in
Matthew, in the ‘Sermon on the Mount,’ and here in
Luke, in the ‘Sermon on the Plain.’ The wording is
different in Matthew and in Luke, and the scope is a little
different. With New Testament scholars, we may debate
to whom they were even spoken, to the Disciples, as in**

Matthew, or to the Multitude, to the Crowds, as in Luke. The pastor who confirmed me as a boy insisted that we memorize the version in Matthew. I have always thought he did that because it is longer. I think that I will have our Confirmands learn this shorter form, in Luke, by heart, and I know they will.

But none of that, of course, is what is really *hard* about the Beatitudes, about these sentences that begin, literally translated, by saying “They are *happy*, who . . .” It is what Our Lord *teaches* in the Beatitudes that is so very hard, but what could possibly be ‘hard’ about being ‘happy’? It is the happiness and blessedness of the Kingdom of God that seems so very hard, at least to me. Why do I say that? I say that just because it is *not* my idea of happiness for me or for others to be in want, to be slandered, maligned, despised, or all of the above. I am

no more inclined than anyone to love my persecutors, hearing strong messages from that primal instinct, hard-wired into all of us, that such people are to be feared and not trusted, and certainly not *loved*. My idea of happiness does not include using others as a doormat, but neither do I enjoy *being* one. I have to wonder which is really harder and more challenging, the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes. I would have to say that, not counting the First Commandment in which the LORD demands our whole love and obedience, Commandments 2 through 10 seem easier to keep than any one of the Beatitudes. And I wonder, as I read them, as I hear them read, as I teach them to my Confirmands and to my Congregation, has there been even a single day of my life when I have kept all the Beatitudes or any of them perfectly? God Our Heavenly Father is our Judge,

but thanks be to Him through His Son Our Savior that He pleads our case based on *His* righteousness, and not ours, certainly not mine, and that the Father sends His Holy Spirit, Whom the Son promised us for Whose coming into our hearts the Son prays without ceasing, so that we may *believe*, contrary to what we know of the world and contrary to what we know about ourselves, that the happiness, the beatitude of the Kingdom of God may be ours as well, may be mine as well.

Last Sunday, the Sunday we Lutherans and some other Protestants celebrated as ‘Reformation Sunday,’ was also a special Sunday for Roman Catholics and, I believe, for all Christians, as the Patriarch of Rome, Pope Benedict XVI, *beatified* 498 of the 7,000 Spanish Catholics, most but by no means all of them members of the clergy or religious orders, who were deliberately

murdered because they were Catholics by the Socialist and Communist forces in the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s. 'Beatification' is the second of three stages on the way to 'canonization' or sainthood in the Roman Catholic Church. This was the largest mass beatification in Catholic Church history. Why is this important for us to care about or even to notice at all. It is not because we are obliged to pay attention to what the Pope says about anything. Indeed, we Lutherans are not obliged to pay attention to anyone at all, not to the Pope and certainly not to a lowly parish Pastor should either of them tell us that we are about to walk off the long end of a short pier or to commit some other serious mistake which we, and the whole Congregation or Church may live to regret. No, we are not obliged to pay the Pope any mind, even if he should tell us that, when walking the long way off that

short pier we will fall most certainly *down*, no, we as Lutherans, have the perfect right to believe that we just might fall *up*—particularly if the Pope says contrariwise. So, I am not saying we should listen to the Pope, and I do not want the good Presbyterian and Methodist folk at the Brogue Store or the Cape Horn Family Restaurant confused by hearing that those Lutherans at Saint James and their notorious Pastor are worshipping the Pope or any such thing. What I *am* saying is this: In *that* part—the overwhelmingly and immensely huge part—of the Christian Church on earth, after a rigorous post-mortem inquiry into the character of anyone proposed for sainthood, and after being satisfied through an equally rigorous system of verification that the dead Christian in question is praying effectively for those still in this life, the Roman Church does single out and lift up as

examples of living faith to all Christians who will pay heed the lives of a few, in this case and at this point more than a few, 498, but 498 out of 7,000, in whom the Beatitudes of Our Lord Jesus Christ were an unmistakable, living reality and a living reality until life's end, in these 498 cases, that end coming in the form of unspeakable tortures and execution by mob or peoples' court headed by a Bolshevik commissar and a Spanish or foreign firing squad of men who had condemned those priests and friars and nuns, those youth members of Catholic Action and children being educated in Catholic schools long before they had ever met them, condemned the very *idea* of them, the actual living *persons* of the condemned being of no consequence whatever. Perhaps their entire lives were not all so 'beatific,' so 'happy' *in* the terms and *on* the terms of the

Kingdom of Heaven as their lives were toward the end, but in their witness unto death, in their martyrdom their lives were summarized by the One on account of Who they died. The red prophets of blood and revolution and death to faith and hope and any sort of personal life would gladly and gleefully have put Christ Himself to death, if only they could have devised a way to erase His life and His Holy Name from history and from the hearts of men and women who bear His Name, and Heaven only knows they tried to do just that, attacking especially the vulnerable minds of children, ripping them away from their parents and from their true spiritual Mother, the Church, but they did *not* succeed, not *anywhere*, and today the Angels of Heaven laugh at them in hell as the Church on earth lifts up their victims, and the Bride of

Christ, the Church in Heaven, gathers them in her arms and presents them to Her Lord forever.

In these lives, and in thousands upon thousands of others, the beatitude, the blessed peace of God has shined out with such brilliance that it shines down the centuries. In some we have known, those whose lives will never be publicly acclaimed anything other than ordinary, a glimpse of the extraordinary happiness of living in the peace of God has been seen, if not on all days, then on some; if not throughout an entire life, then in some phase of that life, not necessarily toward the end, but truly blessed indeed if the end came with such blessedness, with such peace.

Today, as we remember those we love but can no longer touch or feed or clothe or surprise with a gift or comfort with a hug, I invite you to think of the ways in

which the blessedness Christ describes was seen and felt in that life. And, as you do that, as you come forward to light a candle, or as you simply light the lamp of remembrance in your heart, may the Holy Spirit lead you to discover that same capacity within yourself, and may He strengthen your will to live the image of God you carry by grace within. ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from ours sins by His blood and has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. ✠ Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!