

And I mean to be one too? Really?  
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And I want to be one too. Really, do you really want to be a saint? I'd think about that for a few moments. I mean really what is so great about being a saint? Oh she or he is a saint is a common phrase, but that conjures up the image of some faithful, wonderful, caring, loving person. However in real life most saints are difficult challenging people. Many of them also came to an unfortunate or painful end because of what they said and did by speaking truth to power. That is never popular and usually not safe.

Now by saint I want to look in broad terms. Think not just the Saints from All Saints Day those official saints, but the Communion of Saints that we commemorate on All Souls Day November 2. This is the heritage of all those who have gone before, that long line of faithful people who are the church.

The reason the Beatitudes are always the reading for All Saints or All Saints Sunday is that they represent a world turned upside down. A world that represents the kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming. Jesus is already proving to be something other than the Messiah everybody expected and his vision of the kingdom is very different. All through our readings during October we have been seeing this made evident.

Now if we had done a full All Saints service on November 1 I would be reading Matthew 23:1-12. In this passage Jesus tears into the Jewish leadership, Scribe, Sadducee and Pharisee. He chastises them for desiring honor and glory for their scrupulous worship and high standing. He accuses them of being all show and no substance. He ends the passage with verse 12 "The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

This makes a nice fit with the Beatitudes, which focus on the turning upside down of what we would expect of great leaders and faithful people. Saints for the most part do in fact follow the beatitudes and work for a world where the Beatitudes are the norm because they often refuse to conform to society. This means they can be very frustrating to deal with as well.

They can be officially recognized saints like the girl who was 12 years old in 1922 in impoverished Macedonia, who in 1948 was the principal of a school in Calcutta that would 31 years later receive the Nobel Peace Prize as Mother Teresa. They can also be one of the many people the Episcopal Church recognizes as "saints" in our book Holy Women, Holy Men, Celebrating the Saints. These are all normal people who have led exceptional lives, but are not listed as official saints. Jonathan Daniels and Martin Luther King Jr. come to mind among many others. One who is not officially recognized but pops into my mind is a priest I went to seminary with and serves on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in the Dakotas. A faithful servant who has several times run up

against the powerful and paid the price for speaking truth to power until she finally found a call in a place nobody else wanted. Now she has an incredible ministry to Native Americans even though she is not one herself.

So what are the characteristics of the kingdom that the Beatitudes teach? Now the Beatitudes for most people are very challenging, because they seem impossible and to be honest don't make much sense to us. In a world that revels in being first, powerful and wealthy these call us to examine ourselves about what is really important. I am always amused that people yell about making sure the 10 commandments are posted in places, but you never hear anyone getting excited about posting the Beatitudes. Eugene Peterson in the Message has a very thought provoking translation of them and I think he makes them accessible to most of us. So here they are:

Matt. 5:3 "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

This is about getting our ego out of the way. This is the focus of what Richard Rohr, Thomas Merton and others teach. This is being willing to accept that I am not the most important person in the world. This is about lifting up others and allowing God to be at work within you.

Matt. 5:4 "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

God doesn't intentionally cause pain. The world does that quite well on its own. However what we do with that pain can help us grow or bring us down. Sometimes people will say God doesn't give us more than we can handle. Well that's lousy theology and it is not anywhere in the bible. What is promised in scripture is that God is down in that muck with us, giving us what we need to move forward. This is the difference between falling down and in Richard Rohr's words, falling upwards. This is about saying yes to God's love that is there for us all day everyday forever.

Matt. 5:5 "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

This goes along with setting our ego aside. Now we all need a strong sense of self, but there is so much more to life than being number 1. The desire for more can never be satisfied.

Matt. 5:6 "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

Matt. 5:7 "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'carefull,' you find yourselves cared for.

Matt. 5:8 "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put

right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

This could be a sermon all by itself. This is a key issue. Saints know who they are and whose they are. So many live with a spiritual disconnect between heart and mind. This creates a spiritual dissonance that can and usually does cause great pain. This is where a deep prayer life is very helpful and important.

Matt. 5:9 “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

Wow wouldn’t the world be a different place if a few more people could do this!

Matt. 5:10 “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom. Matt. 5:11 “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. 12 You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, / do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Here is where so much of our society is out of control. I know people, good faithful people, preaching the gospel who find themselves without a pulpit because they have dared to preach the gospel. The Rev. Rob Bell is one who comes to mind. He had a spiritual awakening when he realized that God really does love everyone, unconditionally all the time. He was so inspired he wrote the book *Love Wins*. If you haven’t read it, read it. He basically said that a loving God would not create a hell of eternal punishment. The mega-church he found saw 2000 people, half the congregation walk out after the publication and then the board of the church he founded fired him. He is now a famous author and speaker, spreading his message of God’s love to a much wider circle of people including many in the Episcopal Church. Most of what he is doing is repairing the damage he has seen from the image of an angry God preached by so many.

Now many of the people, the saints, that I have mentioned are famous. IN our bulletin is a list of our own saints, people we remember this All Saints/All Souls Sunday. Please take a moment and think about them, remember them, pray for them as they pray for you. Then with them on your heart please come forward and light one of the candles the ushers have and place them up either on the altar or on the tables in front of the altar.

And yes, come to think of it, about being a saint, I mean to be one too.