

The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber

11.2.25

The Feast of All Saints

Blessed are you who are poor. Woe to you who are rich. We have heard a series of challenging messages from Jesus about wealth in recent Sundays.

Several weeks ago, Jesus told a parable in which a rich man was called a fool for storing up his extra grain in a barn. Today we are using the readings for All Saints Day, but in the regular Sunday readings appointed, the Gospel tells of Zaccheus, a rich man who pledges to give half of his possessions to the poor, and to pay reparations to those he defrauded, at four times the amount he took.

And today, Jesus gives a sermon with blessings for the poor, and curses on the wealthy.

It all seems upside-down. Especially this week, when the poor are not seeming so blessed, as SNAP benefits run out, and some of them are working without pay. It does not feel like our government or our policies consider the poor to be blessed.

With a government shut-down and worries over whether people will have jobs and whether health insurance will be affordable, holding on to whatever money we have seems sensible. Giving away anything, with so much uncertainty ahead, seems like something a only real fool would do.

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Today, this morning, we are celebrating All Saints Day. Traditionally, this means the saints recognized by the Church. Saint Francis and Saint Mary Magdalene and our own Saint Martin, who we will celebrate all on his own next Sunday. And others listed in our Lesser Feasts book, like Saint Absalom Jones, Saint Pauli Murray, and Saint Jonathan Daniels.

As time has gone on, we have melded this feast a bit with the feast of All Souls or All the Faithful Departed, which we will officially celebrate later this evening. These days we mostly think of All Saints as honoring the entire communion of saints, the named ones, and the regular people, our loved ones and ancestors gone before.

And this feels right. Because we know that among those people gone before, there are surely some saints, maybe not known or recognized by the Church. Polly Randall, for example, who our robing room is named for. And I'm sure you can think of others, in treasured St Martin's memory, or perhaps in your own family.

What makes a saint? I mean, how do you become a saint? How do you become holy? How do you become blessed?

Well, you do not become a saint by doing everything right, by being perfect. Saints are human beings. And we learned last week from the tax collector and Pharisee, that it is not checking all the boxes or doing all the right things that makes us right with God. Even if such a thing were possible for us, which it is not.

How do you become a saint?

If you think about the saints in your life, the teacher who believed in you, the mentor at work, the uncle who treated you like you were the most special person in the world, if you think about the saints you know, you might realize they have something in common, and that is, they give.

They give of themselves, their time, their love. They give these things freely. And it is this giving that we can sense, when we are in the presence of a living saint, because being in the presence of someone who gives themselves away feels like a gift, like a blessing.

Those of us who went on retreat this past week met a few people possibly on their way to sainthood. Julia, in the kitchen, who so skillfully and lovingly prepared our meals. Carol and Amy at the front desk. Erin, caring for the donkeys and the chickens. Fr. Mark, with his stories and mealtime prayers and wise and witty sermons in chapel. It is clear they pour their whole selves into helping others find respite and time with God, and because of that, we did find those things.

We are all called to be saints. We who follow Jesus are all called to give of ourselves, to give ourselves away, to God and to others.

We are all called to give ourselves away. This is what our life is about. We do this through our work, giving ourselves to the people we work with and the people we serve. We do this by caring for our family members and friends. We do this by serving this church community and other groups we are involved in. And we do this by giving our money away, to our church and the wider community.

Our giving is a spiritual practice. It is the central spiritual practice of our lives, to give. All the prayer and worship we do will maybe make us kinder, maybe make us better at doing the right thing, but fundamentally our prayer and worship are for making us more generous, more openhearted, helping us give ourselves away more freely.

And here's the secret of the saints. That everything is as Jesus said, it is upside-down from what we have been taught. Because when we give, of our time, of our love, of our money, when we give with an open hand, we find ourselves richer than we could have imagined.

Next Sunday is St Martin's Day and Consecration Sunday. We are all being invited in this season to consider giving as a spiritual practice, to consider giving a proportion of what we get to God. If we do this a little at a time throughout the whole year, we can be amazed at the end of the year how it all adds up. We can go from thinking, "I can't do that much!" to asking "What else could I do?"

The more generously we practice giving ourselves away, holding less and less back, the more we can see a glimpse of the kingdom of God. It is a kingdom where things do not work as we are taught they do, where time and money and love are not like a pie, not like a zero-sum game where we all need to fight for the little scraps. It is a kingdom where the more we give, the more love multiplies. It is a kingdom where there is more than enough for everyone.

Try it. Say I love you. Give your time to someone who needs it. Give some of your money away, every time you are paid. Be a little saintlike. Blessed are you. Amen.