Rev. Charles Dittmeier
Revelations 7:2-4, 9-14
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

FEAST OF ALL SAINTS
Epiphany Catholic Church
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When we think of saints, probably we think of people of great holiness who have been canonized, recognized officially by the Church, and are with God in heaven. But the theme of this Feast of All Saints uses a wider definition of "saints." We can consider all baptized Christians who have died and who are now with God, even if they're not officially recognized by the church. We can even consider all the non-Christians who have lived sincere, good lives following their consciences. They, too, will be saints in heaven. This Gospel for All Saints Day speaks of the Beatitudes, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. And I always, I really like the Beatitudes.

I find it frustrating that, in one sense, most, too many, people consider holiness in terms of the Ten Commandments. And I think really our norm should be the Beatitudes instead. The Ten Commandments are from the Old Testament. They're part of the Jewish law. That's not bad. It's just that at that time of development in the history of God's people, they had a very simple moral law, and it was not very well developed. And Jesus came to develop it. You might remember his saying, "I did not come to abolish the law, the law of Moses, but to fulfill it." The way he saw the Pharisees implementing the law, teaching the law, he was saying they're missing the point. And for Jesus, the Beatitudes are the fulfillment of the law. The Ten Commandments are something of a rough outline.

Then Jesus tried to give it more substance with the Beatitudes. They go way beyond the Ten Commandments about what is expected of us as followers of Jesus. If you notice, the Ten Commandments are basically negative...don't lie, don't steal, don't kill, don't commit adultery. That's relatively easy to do. Not very much of a demand upon us. In one sense, we can observe the commandments by doing nothing at all. And that's certainly not what Jesus had in mind.

Being a Christian like Jesus is more than just NOT doing some bad things. And so Jesus gave us the Beatitudes, which are positive, both in their actions and in the attitudes. It talks about our attitude - being meek, being humble. That's very, very

important. It's not just whether we went to church on Sunday or something, some simple action. It's our attitude that guides us through life.

It's interesting to look at the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit. The poor in spirit are those who are aware of their weakness, of their limited nature, the fact that we're not God and that we depend upon God. And so, we turn to God and ask for his presence, his help. Blessed are those who are meek. The meek are the people who reach out to others to care, to give compassion, to give tenderness, people who are aware of the needs of others. Blessed are those who mourn. Those are the people who are in grief, who are sorrowing for various reasons. And Jesus assures us that we will be comforted if we experience that. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those are the people who work that everyone will have what thing is due to them to live a life of dignity and self-respect. The people who work to make that happen, they could pay a very high price for that. Blessed are the merciful. Those are the people who offer compassion, who offer forgiveness to all those around them. Blessed are the pure of heart. That's not talking about sexual purity, but rather to a simplicity of life. The absence of falsehoods and deception, prejudice, bias. Those are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. That's probably the most beautiful of all the Beatitudes. The people who help to break down all the barriers that divide us, that cause conflicts, whether it's class, social class, occupations, gender, race, ethnicity, language. We can imagine so many things, and we do discriminate and cause conflict because of so many things. Some of it's so inconsequential, so trivial, but the peacemakers are those who overcome that, help break down the barriers between God and the people of God and between all of us as brothers and sisters. Then blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Those are the people who are really brave. We're seeing more and more of those now. People who in the political climate are willing to stand up for others. So many people in the Latino community and other groups that are not in favor - the government doesn't favor them. They're afraid to go out, they're afraid to send their kids to school, afraid to go to the doctor, afraid to go to the grocery store. And so often people come and help them for the sake of righteousness. This is not the way it's supposed to be.

And those of you who know the Beatitudes - they're not big theological doctrines. They're not complicated. They're relatively simple, but they're hard. It's so easy to say, "Well, I didn't kill anybody. I didn't commit adultery. I'm following the Ten Commandments. God must like me. Be really happy with me." Jesus says, it goes a lot further than that. We've gotten beyond the Ten Commandments.

You know, right now, so many political groups, they want to put the Ten Commandments in the schools. I saw one meme that said, "We've been using the Ten Commandments in church, and it hasn't done much work. Why is putting them

in school going to be any better?" I wish they'd put the Beatitudes in schools. That would be a real step forward. But that's what we need to do. Matthew positions the Beatitudes right in the middle of his gospel at a very important place to show the strength that they're supposed to have in our lives, the import that they're supposed to have in guiding us. And we really need to pay attention to them. They give the thought of Jesus. They give us a guide for our Christian lives.

We might pay attention to that word "blessed." Blessed are those who do these things. It might be better translated, fortunate are those. The people who have the values that the Beatitudes offer, they are fortunate because they belong to the kingdom of God. They belong to the reign of God. They are creating God's presence, the environment of God's reign now. The people who do the Beatitudes, those are the foundations of the reign of God. The reign of God is not a place, it's an environment. It's the world in which we live, the world that we create when we live according to the value of the Beatitudes.

And so, if we take the Beatitudes seriously, if we let them guide our lives, if we listen to those values and practice them, then truly we will create a place of truth and love, a place of compassion and justice, an environment of peace and freedom and sharing, and that is the reign of God that Jesus calls us to.