

Homily for Sunday, November 1st, 2020 (All Saints)

While God, through Moses, gave us the 10 Commandments, God, through Jesus, gave us the Beatitudes—a new way of living our relationship with God. You may have noticed there are eight Beatitudes with the eighth one sort of spinning into a ninth one about rejoicing in the face of persecution.

I like to look at the first four Beatitudes one way and the last four, differently. The first four—Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, and blessed are those who hunger and thirst—to me are describing negative states. While there is nothing good about poverty, mourning, being too meek, or hungering and thirsting, these are all states we find ourselves in at one point or another. Yet, Jesus is telling us that there is a deeper blessedness that is more profound, more real, and more enduring within us that can never be eradicated by poverty, mourning, meekness or hunger and thirst. In other words, with these first four Beatitudes, we learn that we are more than any negative thing that can drag us down in life. We are more than our failed marriage, more than our sickness, more than our poor image of ourself, more than our addictions, more than anything that brings us down.

The next four beatitudes—blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for their faith—to me, describes how this more-ness, this deeper blessedness wants to express itself in all of us. Hold those two thoughts or “more-ness” and “expression” to the side for now.

On this Solemnity of All Saints, I would like to say a little bit about the Saints and a little bit about “saints in the making.” As you may or may not know, the greatest changes in the Church’s history actually happened during many of our lifetimes. I’m referring to the Second Vatican Council that took place in Rome between 1962 and 1965. It was more radical than we think for we were challenged, with the help of God’s grace, to change the way we thought about God, the Church, the Church’s relationship to the world, the way we celebrate liturgy, etc. But one of the greatest gifts of Vatican II was this universal call to holiness, that is, we are all called to holiness, not just popes, priests, and religious. Everyone, but virtue of baptism is called to holiness; everyone, from their particular situation in life is called to reflect God’s presence in the world. While holiness can be lived in a monastery, for most of us it will be lived by wiping runny noses, changing diapers,

struggling through teenage anxieties, paying bills, repairing leaky roofs, dealing with sickness and death, working on personal relationships, and struggling with questions of faith. These are the arenas we run in; these are the arenas where our salvation and holiness are worked out. Maybe that is what John is referring to at the end of first reading from the Book of Revelation when the angel points to those dressed in white and says, ***“These are the ones who have come out of the great ordeal.”*** These are the ones who were not afraid to get their hands dirty. These are the one who lived their faith not just in the church pews but in the messiness of peoples’ lives. These are the ones who, though stained by the trials of life, still followed the way Jesus laid out for them even though it may have cost them dearly.

I am thinking of a woman, Liz, who for 10 years daily went to the nursing home to see her husband before he died of complications from Alzheimer’s. He did not know her during all that time, but she went anyway. She had come through the great trial not bitter, not angry, not needing to blame anyone, and not needing to ask, “Why me?” She came through with her soiled clothes and dirty hands washed clean and made white in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus. The blood refers to following Jesus into death, and if we do that, the resurrection takes care of itself. Liz’s call to holiness required a lot of dying on her part over those 10 years. She is a saint in the making.

Saints are glimpses of what God is like and what we are called to be. Saints are people who know the truth of the first four Beatitudes, that there is a deeper blessedness in all people from the moment of conception that can never be destroyed by poverty, mourning, meekness or any hunger or thirst. Maybe this is what St. Mother Teresa knew and led her to say, “When I see people, I see God.” Saints are people who know the truth of the last four Beatitudes, that while there is a deep blessedness within them, it is not just for them. This deep blessedness is meant to express itself in the giving of mercy, in purity of heart, in peacemaking, and in suffering on account of their faith in Jesus. Blessedness, like a wonderful light within us, is never meant to be put under a bushel basket. It is meant to shine so as to lead all people to God.

Although I am surrounded by many holy people in this parish unit, I would like to make reference to two people whose beatification the Church celebrates this month.



On October 10th, in Assisi, Italy because this teenager wanted to be buried close to St. Francis, the Church beatified Carlo Acutis. He was born in 1991, raised in Milan, Italy and died in 2006 from leukemia. In his 15 years on this earth, he was a typical teenager. He loved hanging out with his friends, playing soccer with them, and encouraging them when they were down. Although still a young

teenager, he was working at a university level when it came to his hobby of computer programming, and making videos and animations. He was a jokester with his classmates and teachers and enjoyed playing with his PlayStation although he limited his time with it. He called Eucharist his “highway to heaven.” His faith made him a source of mockery, yet it was the very thing that brought his parents back to Church after years of being away. Carlo wasn’t just devoted to the Eucharist but saw the Eucharist as a constant invitation to live his faith in the world. He could not walk to school, even as a child, without giving food and blankets to the homeless of Milan. While he lived in the fashion capital of the world, he did not want his mother buying him brand name clothing or shoes as the money could be used to help the poor. He helped out at the soup kitchens and encouraged his classmates to do the same. Speaking about holiness this child said, “The only thing we have to ask God for, in prayer, is the desire to be holy.” Notice it’s not a request to be holy, only a request to have the desire to be holy.



Just last night (Oct. 31st, 2020), the Church celebrated its latest beatification. Fr. Michael McGivney, a saint in the making, is best known as the founder of the Knights of Columbus. Like Carlo Acutis, Fr. Michael died young; he was only 38. His own father died when Michael, the eldest of 13, was only 21. That left his mother to raise a number of young children on her own. Michael interrupted his seminary studies in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec to come home to Connecticut and help his mother. This may have formed him more than his theological studies. As a young priest in 1882 he founded the Knights of Columbus whose sole purpose

was to help widows and orphans at a time where there was no social assistance. Perhaps he knew the sufferings of others more keenly because of what his own mother and family suffered. Michael McGivney believed in the deeper blessedness of everyone despite the fact that many lived in states of poverty. Fr. Michael's response to the material and spiritual needs of people was his way of living God's call to holiness.

As you ponder God's call to holiness, I leave you with the words of Blessed Carlo Acutis, teenager, saint in the making: "Sadness is looking at oneself, happiness is looking at God. Conversion is nothing but a movement of the eyes".

Fr. Phil