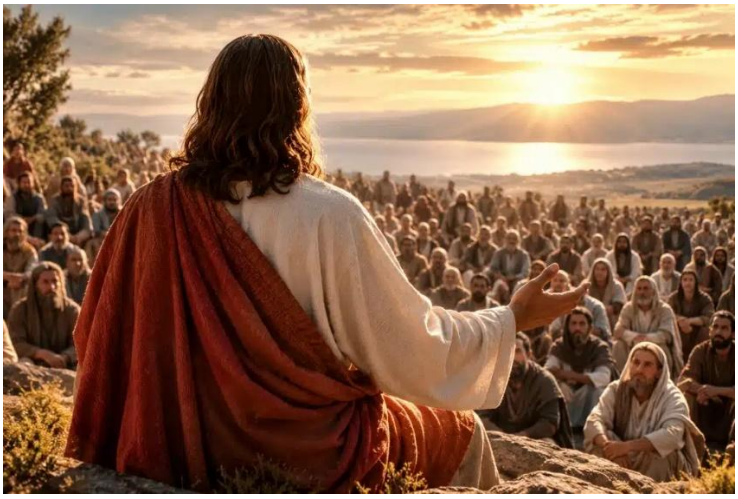
Homily for Sunday, November 1, 2026 (All Saints)



You have all heard this gospel passage, what we traditionally call the Beatitudes (all this blessedness stuff), probably many times in your lifetime. And no doubt you're likely to have heard many different interpretations of the Beatitudes. If you were at the parish mission this past week or at the catechists' workshop, both led by Fr. Eugene O'Reilly, you would have heard him say, "This is how *I* interpret the Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are so rich that no one person's interpretation can monopolize all other interpretations. So, here's just another way of looking at them.

The word "beatitude" translated from Latin to English means "blessed". Jesus looks out at the crowd of people, normally thought to be unfortunate, and pronounces them blessed. The pre-Vatican Church, the Church before the great reforms of the 1960s, used the word "benediction" much more that the word "blessed." Even though the word benediction is no longer in vogue, I sort of like the word. The first part of the word, "bene," means well or good, much like the French word "bien." Diction, as you probably know, means "to speak". So when we pronounce a blessing, a benediction, over someone we are speaking well of that person.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. The crowd is everyone without exception. What Jesus has to say applies to every human being. He is pronouncing a benediction, a blessing, over all the peoples of the earth, both then and now. He's speaking well of humanity. God's first words when looking upon creation was "this is good." But when God created humans, God said, "this is very good." Like father, like son, in the Beatitudes Jesus is doing the same thing. In this, Jesus' inaugural speech, he looks at the crowd (all of humanity) and speaks well of us saying "blessed are you" eight times.

Now he could have said anything else like, “What I see when I look at you is your greed, your jealousy, your anger, your pettiness, and your incessant penchant to solve problems with violence and war.” That would have been a true observation, but he didn’t say that. Instead, Jesus seeing with the eyes of God, saw our deepest and truest identity. He chose to see a deep blessedness in every person. How you see and how you love are always choices.

I believe the first four beatitudes--blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, and blessed are those who hunger and thirst—are all negative states that drag us down in life. To be poor in spirit means the deeper energies of life have all drained out of you. You have no spirit; you’re moving mechanically through life, but the inner joy is gone. To the outer world you put on a brave face, but inside you’re dead; you’ve got no spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Try as I may, I can’t seem to put a positive spin on mourning. In the world of mourning, I just want to get over it and move on. Blessed are the meek is another hard one, a negative state. When you’re too meek, you usually want nothing, expect nothing, and get nothing in life. You’ve stopped pushing into life; you’re wallpaper or a doormat. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst, I also see as a negative state. To hunger and thirst means you’re not satisfied.

I see these first four as negative states that drag us down. But Jesus sees deeper. He sees a deeper blessedness that cannot be eradicated by any negative state no matter how bad or paralyzing it may be. Jesus sees a deeper blessedness that will eventually stir and push into poverty of spirit and bring us into the richness of spirit, into the richness of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus sees a blessedness deeper than our mourning. This blessedness will push into our mourning and bring us comfort. Jesus sees a blessedness that will push into your meekness and from wanting nothing, expecting nothing, and getting nothing, you will get it all; you will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. I’ve hungered and thirsted, not for food or water, but for many other things that are just as essential as food and water, and I have to say, there’s nothing blessed about it. Yet Jesus says, “Phil, I see a deeper blessedness in you, and in all people, that will eventually stir and push its way into all the hungry and thirsty corners of your life, and you will be satisfied.”

So, I take these first four beatitudes as describing negative states that tell us what we all experience, but only Jesus tells us who we most truly are. In the eyes of God, we are blessed, way beyond any negative state that can afflict us. Jesus doesn't think we have a little bit of blessedness in us; he thinks we *are* the blessedness. That's why he keeps saying, "Blessed are you" eight times. In other words, we have transcendence power. There is something in us that allows us to transcend the negative states and remind us that in God's eyes we are blessed. God sees and loves in us what we have trouble seeing and loving in ourselves.

The last four beatitudes—blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, and blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness sake—are there to tell us how the blessedness manifests itself in our lives. When you allow the blessedness to stir within you, you'll receive mercy, you'll see God, you'll be called children of God, and you'll even rejoice when you are persecuted—believe it or not.

Now if the reading went a little bit longer Jesus would have said, "you are the salt of the earth, but if salt loses its saltiness, it's good for nothing only to be thrown out and trampled on. It seems a bit scary almost suggesting that if we don't as Jesus wants us to do, he might throw us away and trample us under foot. Not a chance. He's already told us, especially in the first four beatitudes, that there is a deeper blessedness in each of us that can never be eradicate by any negative state in life. Or as Paul say, "Is there anything in this world or in the world to come that could ever come between you and the love God has for you?" Not a chance. Salt, on a chemical level, can never lose its saltiness. If you try to get rid of salt by throwing it into a bucket of water, you've not gotten rid of it at all. What you've done, instead, is created salt water. So, fear not. There is no way you can ever get God to stop seeing the deeper blessedness in you. And there is no way salt can stop working. Oh, and by the way, there is also no way for you and I to completely block out the light that is within us. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. So let the blessedness stir, let the salt work, and let the light that is within you shine for all to see.

I end with this story from the late Brennan Manning. It's a little reflection on the first reading from the Book of Revelation. It describes an awkward situation. The Angels are gathered around the throne of God along with the elders

and all living creatures, doing what they are supposed to be doing—praising and worshipping God. Then some ordinary, run-of-the-mill outsiders, nobodies, appear dressed in white robes. When they question God about who these misfits are, God says, "These are the ones who have gone through the trials of life. Despite the negative states in life that they have endured, they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, the blood of my son, Jesus. These are the ones, despite it all the hardships, who know they are blessed. Here's what Brennan Manning writes.

Because salvation is by grace through faith, I believe that among the countless number of people standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands (see Rev. 7-9), I shall see the prostitute from the Kit-Kat Ranch in Carson City, Nevada, who tearfully told me she could find no other employment to support her two-year-old son. I shall see the woman who had an abortion and is haunted by guilt and remorse but did the best she could faced with the grueling alternatives; the businessman besieged with debt who sold his integrity in a series of desperate transactions; the insecure clergyman addicted to being liked, who never challenged his people from the pulpit and longed for unconditional love; the sexually abused teen molested by his father and now selling his body on the street, who, as he falls asleep each night after his last "trick" whispers the name of the unknown God he learned about in Sunday school; the deathbed convert who for decades had his cake and ate it, broke every law of God and man, wallowed in lust, and raped the earth.

"But how?" we ask.

Then the voice says, "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

There they are. There we are—the multitude who so wanted to be faithful, who at times got defeated, soiled by life, and bested by trials, wearing the bloodied garments of life's tribulations, but through it all clung to the faith.

My friends, if this is not good news to you, you have never understood the gospel of grace.

And I would add, "We've not understood the Beatitudes either."

Fr. Phil