

All Saints Sunday-A 2020 LBI—November 1, 2020

On the night before he died, Jesus spoke these words to his disciples: *“If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belong to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you. . . In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world.”* (John 15:18-19, 16:33)

Today we gather to celebrate the lives of the saints. It is fitting that we do this. They endured to the very end and are now gathered in the presence of our Father in heaven. And as John reveals from the vision he records in Revelation about those who suffered martyrdom: *“These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

The faithfulness and example of the saints inspire us, but if I am being truthful, they also humble me. How am I ever to measure up to their example?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers us hope in his book “The Cost of Discipleship,” especially in chapter 6 – The Beatitudes.

He says - Picture the scene. Jesus gathers on the hillside with those whom he has called to follow him. Below the multitudes have gathered to hear him teach about the kingdom of God. Jesus begins with the Beatitudes, in which he describes the blessedness

of those who have left everything to follow him on his mission to save the world from sin and death. These few followers were once like the others on the hillside that day, but now they are consecrated for a life of total devotion to following Jesus wherever he goes, even to the cross.

Recently they had lived amongst the people gathered below them. One day they will again live amongst them and proclaim a gospel message they can't begin to envision at this moment. All they can do is surrender their all and follow the master. From this point on I will quote extensively from Bonhoeffer so you can hear from a saint who lived his faith up to his martyrdom in a Nazi concentration camp just days before it was liberated. Jesus thus speaks to what this decision means for them: *"He has called them, every one, and they have renounced everything at his call. Now they are living in want and privation, the poorest of the poor, the sorest afflicted, and the hungriest of the hungry. They have only him, and with him they have nothing, literally nothing in the world, but everything with and through God. . . . Disciples and people, they belong together. The disciples will be his messengers and here and there they will find men to hear and believe their message. Yet there will be enmity between them right to the bitter end. All the wrath of God's people against Him and His word will fall on his disciples; his rejection will be theirs."* (pgs 105-6)

Jesus speaks of the disciples, calling them blessed, but the blessing is not the world's kind of blessings. They are not blessed because of what they'll endure. They are blessed because he called them. ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*** They will not be like the religious leaders who are firmly planted in the kingdom of this world. They will have no stature, no wealth, no standing in the

world. *“For the sake of Jesus, they live a life of absolute renunciation and poverty. And in that very poverty they are heirs of the kingdom. They have their treasure in secret, they find it on the cross. And they have the promise that they will one day visibly enjoy the glory of the kingdom, which in principle is already realized in the utter poverty of the cross.”* (pg 108)

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” *“By ‘mourning’ Jesus . . . means doing without what the world calls peace and prosperity. . . Such men mourn for the world, for its guilt, its fate and its fortune. While the world keeps holiday they stand aside, and while the world sings, . . . they mourn. . . . The world dreams of progress, of power and of the future, and while the world sings . . . they mourn.”* Luther calls them “sorrow-bearers.” *“The disciple community does not shake off sorrow, . . but willingly bears it. . . . They stand as the bearers of sorrow in the fellowship of the Crucified. . . . This Man is their comfort, Thus, do they find their true home with their crucified Lord, both here and in eternity.”* (108-9)

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” *This community of strangers . . . renounce(s) every right of their own and live(s) for the sake of Jesus Christ. When reproached, they hold their peace; when treated with violence they endure it patiently; when men drive them from their presence, they yield their ground. . . . They show by every word and gesture that they do not belong to this earth. ‘Leave heaven to them,’ says the world in its pity, ‘that is where they belong.’ But Jesus says, ‘**They shall inherit the earth.**’ . . . Those who now possess it by violence and injustice shall lose it, and those who here have utterly renounced it, who were meek to the point of the cross, shall rule the new earth. . . . The renewal of the earth begins at Golgotha, where the meek one died, and*

from thence it will spread. When the kingdom finally comes, the meek shall possess the earth.” (109f)

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.” *“The followers of Jesus . . . look forward to the future righteousness of God, but they cannot establish it for themselves. Those who follow Jesus grow hungry and thirsty on the way. . . . Happy are they who have the promise that they shall be filled. . . . They will eat the Bread of Life in the Messianic Feast. They are blessed because they already enjoy this bread here and now, for in their hunger they are sustained by the bread of life, the bliss of sinners.” (110-11)*

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” *“These followers of Jesus have renounced their own dignity, for they are merciful. . . . For the only honour and dignity they know is the Lord’s own mercy, to which alone they owe their very lives. He was not ashamed of his disciples, he became the brother of mankind, and bore their shame unto the death of the cross. That is how Jesus, the crucified, was merciful. His own followers owe their lives entirely to that mercy. It makes them forget their own honour and dignity, and seek the society of sinners. They are glad to incur reproach, for they know that then they are blessed.”(111-12)*

“Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.” *“When Jesus called them, they found their peace, for he is their peace. But now they are told that they must not only have peace but make it. . . . His disciples keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others. . . . Now that they are partners in Christ’s work of reconciliation, they are called the sons of God as he is the Son of God.” (112f)*

“Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs in the kingdom of heaven.” *“This does not refer to the righteousness of God, but to suffering in a just cause, suffering for their own just judgments and actions. For it is by these that they who renounce possessions, fortune, rights, righteousness, honour and force for the sake of following Christ, will be distinguished from the world. . . . Not recognition, but rejection, is the reward they get from the world for their message and works. It is important that Jesus gives his blessing not merely to suffering incurred directly for the confession of his name, but to suffering in any just cause. They receive the same promise as the poor, for in persecution they are their equals in poverty.”* (112-13)

*“The fellowship of the beatitudes is the fellowship of the Crucified. From the cross there comes the call “blessed, blessed.” The last beatitude is addressed directly to the disciples, for only they can understand it, **“Blessed are you when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”** “For my sake’ the disciples are reproached, but because it is for his sake, the reproach falls on him. It is he who bears the guilt. . . . These meek strangers are bound to provoke the world to insult, violence and slander. . . . While Jesus calls them blessed, the world cries, ‘Away with them, away with them!’ Yes, but whither? To the kingdom of heaven. ‘Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.’ There shall the poor be seen in the halls of joy. With his own hand God wipes away the tear from the eyes of those who had mourned upon earth. He feeds the hungry at his Banquet. There stand the scarred bodies of the martyrs, now glorified and clothed in the white robes of eternal righteousness instead of the rags of sin and*

repentance. The echoes of this joy reaches the little flock below as it stands beneath the cross, and they hear Jesus saying: "Blessed are ye!"

Bonhoeffer, a saint of our time, calls us to learn of the blessings promised to and proclaimed on those who have given themselves totally to following Jesus Christ. Though seemingly impossible, with God, nothing is impossible. The risen Jesus said to Thomas as he touched his wounds: *"Have you believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet come to believe."* That's us and why we are able to sing our song of hope and self-dedication: *"They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still, the world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus will . . . and I mean to be one too."*