

## Signs of the Saints, Goals of All Souls

All Saints' Sunday

5 November 2023

Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church  
San Francisco, California

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Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 34:1-10, 22

I John 3:1-3

Saint Matthew 5:1-12

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During this past week we passed by two important days in the Church Year. They are not important in their passing on to us events out of Jesus' life, nor are they important in their indicating to us movements through Salvation History. Rather they are important to us in that they point to our individual journey, our journey as the church, our journey with the saints, and finally our own individual journey to death – to the end of time. These important days are All Saints' and All Souls' Day. The first honors those who by the example of their own lives showed us the way to live in Christ, and thus we honor them and give thanks to God for them. The second, All Souls' Day honors those whose deaths we hold dear to us, whose memory we hold sacred, and whose faithfulness we hold close to our hearts. We are fortunate, here at Trinity+St. Peter's in that we have a columbarium that we can visit, where we might remember and give thanks. I did just that a couple of weeks ago, remembering old friends, and giving thanks to God for them. I'd like to take a moment to remember, to thank, and to honor. Let us observe a few moments of silence as we remember those who have gone before us with a sign of faith.

The Gospel for All Saints' Day is all too familiar to us, the Beatitudes that are remembered in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. It's not one of my favorite texts, I much prefer the version in Saint Luke that is modeled on the Hebrew Scriptures, and the form of Blessings and Courses that accompanied and often ended the covenant agreements between the saints of old and God. Matthew, however takes a much milder stance. Of special interest here is Peir Paolo Passolini's film "The Gospel According to Saint Matthew." Passolini was an Italian Communist, not a Christian, and yet he captured in his film, the intensity of Jesus' ministry. Of special interest is his version of the Sermon on the Mount, during which Jesus' announces his Happinesses, or Beatitudes. Usually depicted on a quiet and grassy hillside, dappled with happy people, listening to the distant teacher, Passolini has Jesus racing ahead of disciples and people slinging back at them the Beatitudes. Visually in is the exact opposite of what you might expect.

When I first saw this scene I realized what its import was = behaviors that are expected of all of us. Here is what is expected: To be Poor in spirit, and in that to gain the kingdom of heaven. We leave room in our poverty for a fulness of the Spirit and the

grace of that same Spirit. The expectation that we will mourn – again we will miss someone, or something leaving room in our souls and in our hearts for a fullness that is yet to come. We are to be meek, and in that weakness we leave room for others, for the neighbor, for the enemy, for anyone that God also loves and enjoys. We are to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Again there is that emptiness that seeks to be filled with God's good graces and justice. Such an attitude leads us on the blessings of being merciful, just as Christ was merciful, and how God is merciful toward us. This can lead us to a purity of heart, a heart that yearns for goodness for all of humankind, that yearns for peace, that makes for justice and peace. Finally there is the realization that such behaviors on the part of saints and souls just might result in persecution, in a lack of understanding on the part of others – and yet we must persist in such a purity of heart. Yes, these are the behaviors for which we see evidence in the lives of the saints, and for which we give thanks in the lives of those who have gone before us in faith.

Blessedness, happiness, these are gifts that are given to us and that we in turn can give to those who live around us and with us. It is, however, a rough road to follow. Jesus reminds us of that in the closing verse of his sermon: *Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Or, as Bobbie McFerrin said: "Don't worry – be happy!"

SDG