

In 3rd grade, I was Saint Bridget. Granted it was only for a day. As a part of my catholic school curriculum, each student studied a saint, created and wore the costume and paraded around the school into and out of the other classrooms sharing what we learned about our saints. Being St. Bridget is my first memory of All Saints Day. By middle school, I understood that All Saints Day was the day when church lasted forever- the reading of the necrology in a large urban parish in Memphis was by no means a short endeavor. And as I moved into high school, All Saints Day became one of our annual Chapel Days with Eucharist, at the all-girls catholic school; it was special though, because we signed the Honor Code as a part of that liturgy.

Today's liturgy is a celebration of All Saints Day. It may be your first time to celebrate this feast, or like me, you might have memories that span back to your early childhood. Today is more than just a day to turn in your pledge. While that is important, we also remember and give thanks for all the saints that have gone before us- the saints of legend and the saints of our own lives. Luke's Gospel message calls us into a life of holiness as he writes the Beatitudes that we hear today.

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. These two beatitudes begin Jesus' Sermon in the Field and parallel the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's account of what we believe to be the same sermon. While these Gospels recount the same event- one is on a mountain, the other on a level place; one takes about seven minutes to read through, the other two; one qualifies the poor as poor in spirit and the hungry as those who hunger for righteousness, the other simply calls them the poor and the hungry with no spiritualizing of the beatitudes, which is the one we read today.

The set of four blessings that open Jesus' sermon are not easy; they can actually be unnerving:

Blessed are you who are poor.

Blessed are you who are hungry now.

Blessed are you who weep now.

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Yet, Jesus does not stop there. He adds four woes;

Woe to you who are rich.

Woe to you who are full now.

Woe to you who are laughing now.

Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

If the blessings were at all unsettling for you, as they are for me, then hearing these woes is almost beyond words. The feeling reminds me of the opening lyrics of a James Taylor song- "source of all we hope or dread." My heart sinks when I hear the woes that Jesus names. For most of us, it might be easier to remain in the category of the wealthy, satisfied, and happy as opposed to the homeless, starving and depressed. These are hard words amidst the good news, a bit of dread among our hope.

But before we can see the good news, Jesus speaks of division between the prophets and the false prophets, those who he describes as blessed in relation to the prophets and those who he describes with woe, or this exclamation of grief, in relation to the false prophets. As much as I want to place myself in one of these categories, as much as I fear relating to the woes, and as much as I hope to be described as blessed- that's really not the point here. Saint Ambrose wrote, "Luke's hearers then and now should see beyond themselves to the one who was made poor for them." Seeing beyond ourselves is crucial to this message, because really it's not about us. It's about Jesus. Jesus hungered for us and Jesus wept for us; Jesus was hated, excluded, reviled and defamed as he was nailed to the cross for us. Jesus was the blessed that we hear about today.

The woes are obstacles. They are obstacles to the blessedness, to our relationship with God. The saints we celebrate today lived into this blessed relationship with God. We are living into the tension of the woes- knowing they

exist, knowing they are part of our lives, knowing that they separate us from God. We, as saints, are called to overcome the woes, these obstacles of riches and being satisfied, of laughing and being spoken well of, so that we may grow more fully into our relationship Christ. Our hope is that we are able to overcome these obstacles that hinder our ability to accept and share the love of God.

For weeks, I have struggled with what we are called to do in response to today's Gospel. So often I have heard Luke's version of the Beatitudes, the ones we heard today, to be a cry for the poor. But it is much more than that and actually quite obvious, because Jesus tells us exactly what to do. He looked up into the eyes of his disciples and told them: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those abuse you. We turn our cheek and we give all that we have, especially to those in need. We become the saints here on earth, the living communion of saints, as we live into Jesus' call for us.

Today, I don't understand saints the same way I did when I was 10. Over the years, my impression of saints has changed. And remember, I know what it's like to be a saint- I was one for a whole day in third grade; and on that day I believed I was a Saint, a capital S, has a feast day, kind of saint. Today I still believe that I am saint, but now the lowercase s kind of saint, just as we all are- each and every one of you. We are the communion of saints. We work together to be the blessed as we overcome the woes. Together we ask for the grace to follow the blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to those ineffable joys that God has prepared for those who truly love him. AMEN.