



All Saints' Sunday, November 1, 2020

Sing with All the Saints in Glory

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Psalm 34:1-10, 22; Matthew 5:1-12

A Sphere of Spiritual Well-Being

"The Dome over Manhattan" was a 1960 proposal that Buckminster Fuller had, to build a two-mile-diameter geodesic dome, which would cover all of Midtown Manhattan. (You can find illustrations of it online.) A huge bubble, with a height twice as tall as the Empire State Building, it stretched from the East River to the Hudson. Mr. Fuller argued that it would be an economical solution to many of the city's most costly concerns, including heat and light, as well as a collector of rainwater. His arguments sound convincing, and the project itself was certainly impressive. And it is somewhat like what we are reading about in our Scripture passage from Matthew.

Jesus is envisioning an overarching environment of peace, comfort, joy, mercy, and hope. We are drawn to it, not only because it sounds wonderful in and of itself, but also because it would stand in contrast to what we know about the world and all its capers. When we pay attention to Jesus' words, we recognize: The Beatitudes are for us, and the Beatitudes are for the saints, as well.

In an article entitled "Have a Blessed Day," Alyce McKenzie reminds us: "The Beatitudes offer formulas for what constitutes blessedness — not good fortune, or prosperity, or personal achievement, but rather being surrounded by a sphere of spiritual well-being as an individual and as a community. In the Old Testament, that meant: Pursuing wisdom, following the commandments, and treating others with respect."

A sphere of spiritual well-being, over each of us and all of us — like the dome over Manhattan. And look what it entails:

Pursuing Wisdom

Pursuing wisdom means, essentially, gaining something that only God's Holy Spirit can provide us. Knowledge we can find in school, in great books, and — more and more commonly, if we are careful in our search — on Google and YouTube. But wisdom is something more. Wisdom comes as we allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our inmost being; as we see with the eyes of faith; as we act according to what God reveals. Sometimes wisdom draws upon our knowledge, or our experience, or our awareness. And yet, wisdom from God can do much more — prompting us to learn more than we know, to do more than we have done, to comprehend more than we have noticed.

"True wisdom," as John Calvin says, "consists in two things: knowledge of God and knowledge of self." Have you been getting to know God better? Have you been getting to know yourself better? Then you have been pursuing wisdom.

Following the Commandments

And what about following the commandments? By following the commandments, we mean, of course, the Ten Commandments: the rules that give shape and structure to our lives. Like the structural framework of a geodesic dome, they hold it all together. We would do well to heed these words of John Calvin: "We are in no position to rely upon God's promises unless we obey His commandments."

Treating Others with Respect

What about treating others with respect? Has this goal fallen out of favor, in the general way people act, the way they live now? We hear of all sorts of clashes between people that, at their core, demonstrate lack of respect. Sermons are about Good News, not bad news, so I will not belabor the point. But if the Beatitudes teach us anything, they teach us to believe that the other person is worthy of our attention, our value, our compassion, our actions on their behalf. Treating others with respect takes no more time than not doing so. Jesus illuminates this, in the Beatitudes: His gift of attributes, to hold in our hearts and minds, to keep near us — inside our calendar, on our refrigerator, in our office desk drawer — as a reminder. Treating others with respect is a life-practice that will become almost automatic, when we practice it over and over again.

If you ran into an old friend whom you had not seen in a long time, and if they asked how you were, and if you said: "I am pursuing wisdom, following the commandments, and treating others with respect," would they be surprised by your answer? They might be surprised you phrased it that way. But they know you well enough to know that you mean what you say.

The Beatitudes are for us. They are also for the saints of God whom we remember on this All Saints' Day — people who, having lived this life in faith, now live eternally with the Lord; people who would say about our Lord Jesus, "Gently, deliberately, Christ drew me into that divine sphere of His personality, with the ultimate sureness of truth. How blessed I am, that I was drawn into that intricate tapestry of iridescent grace, which, interlacing with mine, spread patterns of light and love over my life."

The saints are the recipients of the fulfilled promises of the Beatitudes. They are being comforted. They are inheriting the earth. They are filled with good things. They have received mercy. They see God. They are children of God. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Their reward is great, in heaven. They have obtained the crown of glory. Their souls have gained the joy of eternity. If you have been wondering about your friend, your family member, who, having lived this life in faith, now lives eternally with God, trust and believe, that is their reality, now. As for us, we are still on the way of Jesus Christ. We have more to do, along the lines of what Jesus tells us. We have been given the wonderful blessings and responsibilities of sharing the faith.

Jesus is inviting us into His overarching environment of peace, comfort, joy, mercy, and hope — His sphere of influence, that will comfort and will bless. We are invited to sing, with all the saints in glory, Christ's theme song: the Beatitudes. Committed to Christ, and to others, may we live into this attitude: Blessed are those who can give without remembering, and receive without forgetting. In Christ, may it be so. Amen.