

The Solemnity of All Saints
November 1, 2015

The Gospel chosen for today's feast is interesting in that we are given what we know as the Eight Beatitudes from the first part of the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes are, in fact, a charter for holiness.

When we think of holiness we generally think of keeping the Ten Commandments and perhaps some other requirements of the Church like going to Mass on Sundays or fasting during Lent.

But we tend to forget that the Beatitudes go way beyond the Ten Commandments in what they expect of a follower of Christ and yet the sad thing is that we hear relatively few Christians saying that they base their lives on the Beatitudes.

When we go to Confession it's the Ten Commandments we normally refer to and not the Beatitudes. And this is a little bit sad because it's clear from their position in Matthew's gospel that they are extremely important because they provide a kind of mission statement and blueprint for intentional discipleship.

All of the beatitudes are indications that we belong to the 'kingdom of heaven'. This is to be understood not as a place, still less as referring to life after death. But it does describe the kind of society that exists when we live according to these values - a place of truth and love, of compassion and justice, of peace, freedom and sharing.

The general message they all have in common is that we are really blessed when we know our dependence on God.

That's is the kind of Christian we are all called to be. It's these qualities that made the saints we celebrate today who they are and which will make saints of us too.

We venerate the saints because they went far beyond what is required by the Ten Commandments. If we think about it, the commandments can be kept pretty easily.

Many of them are expressed in the negative, "You shall NOT..." so it's possible we can observe them by doing nothing at all! I can say, "I haven't killed anyone... I haven't committed adultery... I haven't stolen..." And that's great. But does that make me a saint?

Being an intentional disciple is a lot more than not doing things that are wrong. The Beatitudes are expressed in positive terms. They also express not just actions but attitudes. In a way, they can never be fully observed. No matter how well we try to observe them, we know we can always go further.

They leave no room for smugness, the kind of smugness the Pharisees had in keeping the Law. The Beatitudes are a true and reliable recipe for sainthood.

I remember when our diaconate class visited Rome in 2009, and we spent the better part of 15 days visiting the many beautiful churches that were filled with so many beautiful paintings of the saints.

In these paintings, you can see all of the familiar saints whose names we know. There was all of the biggies: St. Nicholas, St. Gregory, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis, St. Clare, the apostles...and on and on.

But scattered among those saints are people without names – people you won't find in Butler's "Lives of the Saints." Ordinary men, women and children from all walks

of life. They are the saints whose names are known only to God. They're lives of simple and humble faith illustrate perfectly the day we celebrate today: All Saints.

And the message of those paintings is the message of this feast day: these unknown saints are just as worthy as the ones who are famous. They look like us. They look like people we might pass on the street. If they can be holy, why can't we?

What does it take to join them? There are two important steps that we can follow. First, as Thomas Merton once said, we have to want to become a saint.

Secondly, we need to develop a new and deeper appreciation for how the Beatitudes, and in fact the whole Sermon on the Mount, can give us clear directions in becoming honest to goodness saints in our world and in our lifetime.

And then I promise you, God will do all the rest.