

ALL SAINTS DAY 2016

The Gospel chosen for today's feast is interesting. It gives us what we know as the Eight Beatitudes from the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. It is, in fact, a charter for holiness.

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

What we often tend to forget is that the Ten Commandments really belong to the Old Testament and are part of the Jewish law. Of course, they're still valid and Jesus said clearly that he had not come to abolish the Jewish law but to fulfill it.

So we can say that the Beatitudes are the best example of that fulfillment. The Beatitudes go way beyond the Ten Commandments in what they expect of a follower of Christ and yet we hear relatively few Christians saying that they base their lives on the Beatitudes.

For example, when we go to Confession it is the Ten Commandments we normally refer to and not the Beatitudes. And this is unfortunate because it's clear from their position in Matthew's gospel and the Sermon on the Mount that the Beatitudes are very important. They are a kind of mission statement saying how achieve sainthood which should be the goal of every Christian.

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 is that we are really blessed when we realize our dependence on God.

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

Saints are saints because they went far beyond what is required by the Ten Commandments. If we think about it, the commandments aren't that hard to keep. Most of them are expressed with the negative, "You shall NOT..." so we can observe the last seven by doing nothing at all! "I have not killed anyone... I have not committed adultery... I have not stolen..." But is that really enough to make us saints?

Being a saint requires a lot more than not doing things that are wrong. That's why the Beatitudes are expressed in positive terms. They also express not just actions but attitudes. In a way, they can never be fully observed. But each day we should pray for the grace of God to show us the way to the perfection the Beatitudes call for.

They are a true and reliable recipe for sainthood.