
Human and Blessed

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Salmoon Bashir
The Sunday after All Saints' Day

In the name of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of my early morning traditions has long been to wake up, make a cup of coffee, and start my day listening to the lives of the saints on a Christian app. Of course, this routine has greatly been disrupted since our son was born. Now, a 15-minute episode gets broken up in ten different pieces, snatched whenever I have a free moment. But whenever I get the chance, I still do it.

Sometimes, as I listen, the way the saints are portrayed feels almost untouchable, way above the ordinary human experience. Or maybe it is just the way we see them in stained glass windows, distant and perfect, flawless, frozen in holiness. We think of saints and immediately we picture halos, long robes, incredible courage and bravery, holy patience, divine calmness. But over time, I have realized that the saints I read about are very much people of everyday life.

If you look at the saints, not the statues and frescoes and stained-glass figures, but the people, they begin to seem closer, more human. They fall, they rise, they deny Jesus, and yet they are martyred in His name. I'm sure you can recall a few of them: Peter denying Jesus, Mary questioning her calling, Paul persecuting Christians, Mother Teresa dealt with depression and struggled with spiritual dryness for over fifty years. And somehow, it seems that it was through these very human experiences, that all of these mighty figures came close to God. Saints were human. They are human. Just like you and me, those who have gone before us, all who sit beside us now, and all the saints who will come after us. They are humans and they are closer to God by loving, by feeding and by seeing the other.

Some of the saints I know of are sitting in this place. They loved me, fed me, opened their homes to me when I was a stranger to them. The common saints. The everyday ones. Rich and poor, joyful and grieving, first and last, dying and alive.

Archbishop Rowan Williams once said: "the more fully we embrace our humanity, the closer we come to God." The more human we are, the better our lives be closer to God. This may sound surprising. We often think that holiness is about rising above our flaws, escaping the messiness of life. But God does not call us to escape our humanity. God calls us to inhabit it fully. To be human is to be vulnerable, limited, emotional, sometimes messy and it is precisely in this fullness that God meets us. It is about embracing every part of our humanity: the tears, the sorrows, the laughter, the hunger, the hope, and letting God work through every piece of it.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' Sermon on the Plain gathers every kind of person: poor, hungry, weeping, persecuted and calls them blessed. All of them are blessed. It is easy to look at this very common biblical passage and think of it as Jesus once again taking the side of the last and the least. But let's pause for a moment and listen closely. The repeated word 'blessed' has deep roots. In ancient rituals it referred to consecrating, making something holy. Over time its meaning expanded to include uses such as "to praise" or "to bestow divine favor." Therefore, in Luke 6, the word blessed is often understood as not "happy" or "lucky," but "deeply favored." Blessed or divinely favored are not the perfect, unmistakable people, but those saints who mourn, hunger for justice, show mercy, seek peace, feed the hungry, and remain faithful under persecution. In each blessing, Jesus is describing ordinary human need and calling these experiences blessed. To be blessed, in Jesus' language, is not about success or comfort, being fortunate or favored by luck. It is about being seen, claimed, and held by God sometimes right in the middle of what feels like loss.

You remember that all throughout the Bible, the word 'blessed' is also used to refer to and praise God, e.g., "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," or "Blessed be the name of the Lord." When we say, "Blessed be God," we praise God for His goodness, His faithfulness, His presence and love that endures. When God blesses us, it is as if He is inviting us to share in God's goodness, to reflect God's faithfulness. Being blessed by God is not so much of a reward from God but the light that comes with being closer to Him, striving to be more like Him through our very human experiences. In the same way, rather than being rewarded for their holiness, the saints are blessed because their humanity has come close enough to God that it reflects God's own blessedness. These two opposites, on one side a perfectly whole divine and on the other imperfect, fragile human come together in the word "blessed," and it is in Christ that they become one.

On All Saints' Sunday, we remember that the saints who came before us were not perfect. They were blessed because, in the middle of hardship, they were held by God. What set them apart was not perfection. It was that they were serious about God. Not just in public, but in quiet moments no one else could see. They were so open to God that even their flaws, griefs, desires became places of blessing.

To celebrate All Saints is not just to celebrate their faithful lives but to also remember who we are becoming. Yes! This feast is also about seeing one another and ourselves as saints in progress. Every time we choose mercy over hate, humility over pride, love over fear, we draw ourselves closer to God and closer to being saints. Not because we have achieved some level of holiness, but because through our imperfect, human moments we have allowed God's blessedness to shine through.

This is what baptism claims in us. Through this holy water we are called to live as people who belong to God, who carry divine belovedness into the world. We are called to join this cloud of witness, the communion of saints. Like different pieces stitched into a quilt, God has knit together lives with the saints who have gone before us, who walk beside us now, and who will follow after us. Through this baptism, there are new saints who are becoming the part of this communion. In a few moments, when all of us together will be renewing our baptismal vows, remember that this is not a promise to be perfect, but a promise to be faithful, to keep turning back toward the One who calls us blessed.

Friends, our humanity is not a barrier to holiness, it is the bridge. The saints were human – wonderfully, painfully human. Yet, in their humanity, they drew close to God. Their holiness did not come from escaping these difficult experiences but from allowing God's grace to come in and transform them.

My prayer today is that may we too follow that same path to being fully human and deeply blessed. As we walk through our own joys and heartbreaks, our doubts and our acts of faith, may our lives, like theirs, become places where God's blessedness can shine through. Our path to sainthood begins not in our strength but in our honest, human need for grace. When we love, when we feed the hungry and when we see others, when we choose mercy over hate, love over fear, we too join the communion of Saints and participate in the blessedness of God. Amen!