



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament Ecclesiasticus 2: 7-11
Epistle Ephesians 1: 15-23
Gospel Luke 6: 20-26

The traditional Gospel reading for All Saints Day is the famous Beatitudes: the "*Blessed Are The's...*" that so many know by heart (and so few actually emulate). I'm not exactly sure why we read this today instead of something more specifically about those who have gone on into God's presence after death. Certainly Luke's version of the list includes a couple of the qualities that many non-churchy people expect of somebody called a "saint", like persecution and weeping. But a whole lot of standard characteristics are lacking, like faith, devotion, and perhaps most telling: *being dead!*

In fact, Jesus' words are a lot more significant for those who are alive, right now, than they are for those who have already reached their reward. Those who are listed in the Beatitudes today are most certainly those who have not achieved rewards of any kind. They are what we today would call victims: those who are suffering both because of who they are and what they believe. But the Church also calls them martyrs because, as our Lord reminds us, they are being "excluded, reviled and defamed" because of their relationship with Christ, the Son of Man. Like the Arabic word *jihad*, the term martyr is often misunderstood. Jihad doesn't mean terrorism or even holy war *per se*, but rather a religious struggle such as any of us has in life to fulfill the will of God. And martyr doesn't mean someone who suffers, often quite

loudly, as a victim, but rather one who witnesses to his faith by living and perhaps even dying for it.

Jesus tells us in the Beatitudes that the truly blessed, the truly happy, are those who are faithful despite their circumstances, despite their bad luck, despite the abuse they may receive from others. And this reminds us that those who are really happy in Christ's mind are those who have their priorities straight and who can therefore teach us a thing or two about holy living, and eventually even about holy dying.

This is the season in which we praise the famous and the not-so-famous in our Christian past. We rejoice in the Communion of Saints, that is the great, big family that sounds us from all times and places and who are so varied that they perhaps have only one thing in common- their faith in Christ as the savior- to hold them together. At a time in which churches still have a hard time working together and in which even our Anglican Church throughout the world seems on the verge of splitting up, this "fellowship of love and prayer" is a healthy reminder of what is most important: faith in the savior, compassion for our fellow believers, and witness to the world.

In the baptismal liturgy that we celebrate today, there are several references to this fellowship of the saints: the Apostles Creed mentions it, of course, but we also welcome the newly baptised with these words: "We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood." This "household of God" is the essence of what being a Christian is all about- a member of God's family- His People, saved out of all nations and all eras by the death of Christ on the Cross and his Resurrection to new life. And it also means that in our Christian journey, which begins with our Baptism, we are never alone.

Nobody wishes that the children we baptize here today will be *victims*, even for a noble, or religious cause. We want them to be strong, independent, healthy, and productive, living long and happy and fulfilled. But we do want them to be *martyrs*- in the very best sense of that term: persons who will not be afraid to live what they

believe and who by their every deed and word help in making the world better, healthier and more like the Kingdom of God. "Blessed" are they who do that, no matter how difficult it may be, no matter how many others don't understand or don't support them. These whom we baptize today are saints in the making. How appropriate, therefore, that they join the Christian fold on this day when we affirm the living, praying, witnessing and loving community of faith that we are part of: the Communion of Saints.