

All Saints 2017
Matthew 5:1-12

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.

By this time in the service what I am about to say will come as no surprise: Today is not All Saints Day. All Saints Day is on a fixed day every year and that day is November 1st, which happened to be this past Wednesday this year.

Because All Saints is a rather important feast in the liturgical calendar of the Church, we celebrate it every year. So, if November 1st doesn't fall on a Sunday, we observe the Feast on the following Sunday, which is what we are doing here this morning.

The reason I point that out to you is so that I can tell you this: On the actual day of All Saints, November 1st, I was doing my morning devotion and the Old Testament reading was from the 34th chapter of Deuteronomy, which is the death of Moses. Vv. 7-8 of that reading say this,

“Moses was 120 years old when he died. He eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.”

Thirty days of mourning. That's 30 days of being dressed in sackcloth, 30 days of wearing a veil over your face, 30 days of sitting on an ash heap. That's 30 days of mourning because that's how they mourned back in the days of Moses.

Quite different from today. If you check your employee handbook, you will probably find that for bereavement leave, you get 3-5 days if the person who dies happens to be your spouse, or child, or parent. If the person who died happens to be a grandparent, or aunt, or uncle, maybe

then you get 1-2 days. And then, the days of weeping and mourning are over and its back to work.

30 days to mourn the death of Moses. 3-5 days or maybe 1-2 days to mourn the death of your loved one. And then the days of mourning are ended, rig-ht. At least they are supposed to be. But it just doesn't work that way, does it?

This fall, I watched a series on the Vietnam war on PBS. Throughout the series' episodes, a mother and her daughter from a family in upstate New York were interviewed. When the oldest son turned 18, he enlisted in the Army and was sent to Vietnam. And on the day after his 19th birthday, he paid the last full measure of devotion for our nation. When their son was shipped home, the biggest question the family struggled with was: Where do we bury him? His mother chose Arlington National Cemetery as his final resting place, because she feared that if he had been buried closer to home, she would claw her way into his grave to once again, [and I quote] "feel his warmth".

30 days, 3-5 days, 1-2 days, or a half-century ago, and the days of weeping and mourning are supposed to be over. If that is true, why is it then that even after those days of weeping and mourning are ended, an old letter, an article of clothing, hearing that certain song, a piece of jewelry, that fragrance they used to wear hits your nose, and it all comes back. The pain and the sorrow and tears are back. And you find yourself weeping and mourning long after the days of weeping and mourning are ended.

Why is that? It's very simple: Death stinks. Death is a robber. You've heard that lie of the world, "Death is just a natural part of life." Where is that nonsense found in the Bible?

I will tell you what the Bible says about death: It's an enemy; death is PUNISHMENT. It is punishment for sin. We are going to die, too. And the reason we are going to die is because of sin. Nobody ever dies of old age; nobody ever dies because of heart disease or cancer or any other illness of the body. Sin is the cause of death and you are going to die because you are a sinner.

In fact, you were born sinful and your thoughts, your words, your deeds, what you have done and what you have not done, show it. Because of all of that, you deserve God's temporal and eternal punishment.

You put all that together, and there is no wonder that we weep and mourn and grieve long after the days of weeping and mourning are over.

And no one understands that better than Jesus. Jesus had a friend named Lazarus. Lazarus died and Jesus wept. Shortest verse in all the Bible. One word, in fact, in the original Greek. He mourned over the death of His friend. Jesus knows what it is to mourn.

And because He knows what it is to mourn, He knows what we need. We need to be comforted, because Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." To those who mourn, there is comfort in the only place we can find comfort – the Word of God. And the Word of God says this in Psalm 68, "Our God is a God of salvation, and to GOD, the Lord, belong deliverances from death" (v. 20).

The Lord our God sent us deliverance from death when He sent a Baby Boy born to Virgin Mother in Bethlehem. The very Son of God took on flesh and blood because you have flesh and blood. He became like you in every way, except one – you have sin. He had no sin.

He had no sin of His own, so He took all your sin from you. He took them into His body and then He suffered the punishment you deserve for

those sins. As He bled, as He was nailed to the cross, as He died on that cross, there He gave His life for you – as the payment for your sin.

And you can be certain that God the Father accepted His payment for the sin of all the world because the 3rd day, He raised Him to life again. He rose in triumph, He rose in victory over death, so that He can bring that deliverance into your life and He does that by means of His Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

And, oh what comfort that is for us, especially as we mourn those who have died in Jesus, for when they die, they do not die to eternal punishment. Rather, their bodies are laid to rest and their soul goes to heaven to be with Jesus.

And as wonderful as that is, there is even more to it than. Notice the Psalm says “deliverance - S,” plural, from death. There's more to it than just our soul goes to heaven when we die.

The Bible says there is this as well, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death,” (1 Cor 15:26). That enemy will be destroyed on the day Christ Jesus comes again in glory. On that day, those whose bodies are in the earth and whose souls rest in heaven will be raised from the dead and body and soul put together again, so that they can live, body and soul together, with Jesus. How wonderful that will be! All sin and all its wages of death will be no more. Scriptures say, “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting’” (1 Cor 15:54-55)? It's nowhere, it's not to be found, because death is destroyed by Jesus Christ.

And, Dear Child of God, you are a victor over death because you are in Christ Jesus. And your body, too, shall rise from the dust of the earth.

And, in body and soul, in resurrected glory, you will hear from Jesus, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt 25:34). Then, dressed in white robes, holding palm branches in our hand, wearing the crown of life on our heads, and God having wiped every tear from our eyes, we will take our place at the Lamb’s feast, which has no end.

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED,” and what comfort we have from our Lord Jesus Christ, even after the days and years of weeping and mourning are ended.