

All Saints 2025
Matthew 5:1-12

Appointed Gospel lesson for All Saints', from the 5th chapter of Matthew's Gospel

When Pastor Wilhelm Loehe sent his first colony of Lutherans from Germany to establish the church and community of Frankenmuth, Michigan, it was also his prayer that these faithful Lutherans, both Pastor and People, would be able to evangelize the Native Americans:

"You are my 'epistle' to the heathen," he said. "For by your Christian way of life, and by your piety, the heathen will come to recognize how pleasant it is to have fellowship with Jesus."

These are profound and powerful words! Pastor Loehe recognized that the Gospel is proclaimed not only from the pulpit to the people of God assembled in worship, but also in the lives of God's people.

Throughout the history of the Church, that is the most important way in which Evangelism and Missions happen. In Frankenmuth, many American Indians were baptized because the Lutheran immigrants were "living epistles" with their faith in Jesus. WE HEAR AND RECEIVE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IN HIS HOLY WORD AND SACRAMENTS AND THEN WE LIVE OUT THAT SAME GOSPEL AS "LIVING EPISTLES" TO THE GLORY OF HIS NAME AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR NEIGHBORS.

In our reading from the 7th chapter of Revelation, we read of that *great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes, and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and the Lamb*. These are the faithful Christians who have come out of the great tribulation of earthly life. Those Frankenmuth Lutherans, along with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther and all the Lutheran Reformers of the 16th-century;

the Rev. Dr. C.F.W. Walther and the founding fathers of our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; the faithful Christians who established this congregation, are among that great multitude.

Today, we remember the faithful departed with our celebration of All Saints'. We remember and celebrate the Christian faith and lives of those who have fought the good fight and finished their earthly race in faith.

I. So that no one has any misconceptions or misunderstanding, let us state clearly what the celebration of All Saints is all about. The old, evil foe has twisted the clear message of the Bible so that the saints are not remembered as God wishes them to be. We do not want to lead anyone into the deadly snare and pitfall of superstition and false belief. Thus, for example, we do not pray to the faithful departed for help in our Christian life; nor do we pray for them, since the Lord has already granted them eternal life and salvation. Certainly, and most importantly, we do not place our trust and hope for eternal life in the Saints, but always in Christ alone, as the saints themselves did. To recall Reformation last Sunday, we don't need another hero.

How, then, should we celebrate and remember the lives of the saints in accordance with Holy Scripture? Our Lutheran Confessions, in keeping with Scripture, outline a threefold honor that is rightly given to the Saints:

The first is **thanksgiving**: we should thank God for showing examples of His mercy, revealing His will to save men, and giving teachers and other gifts to the church.

The second honor is the **strengthening** of our faith: when we see Peter forgiven after his denial, we are encouraged to believe that we will be forgiven our sins as well...

The third honor is the imitation of their faith, that “we follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living,” as we pray in our Collect today.

St. John in Revelation comforts us that the departed saints *stand before the throne and before the Lamb*. With these departed saints in heaven, we share their focus on the Lamb of God. As they worship Him for eternity, we worship and adore and give thanks to Him this day and always, the Lamb that was slain so that we might live. In St. John’s glimpse of heaven, the entire host of heaven is gathered around the Lamb -- all eyes are fixed on Him alone. The saints are rightly honored when we look at their lives and work as “stained glass windows.” Stained glass is like all glass, it has no light in and of itself. But, let the brilliance of the sun shine upon the stained glass and it becomes a work of art, a picture worth more than a 1,000 words. In the same way, the Light of the Word, Jesus Christ, has shined His light on His saints and His light shines on us through them -- their thoughts, words, and deeds. Their steadfast faith and good works are not a product of their own reason or strength, but the presence of Christ and the work of His Holy Spirit in them.

Which brings us to the Beatitudes of our Gospel this morning, those beautiful words of our Lord from the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes are not, as they may seem at first hearing, a “how-to” checklist for earning the blessings of God. They are not instructions for living a Christian life, as though somehow, we win God’s favor and the Kingdom of Heaven with our own works and merits. We do not “keep” the Beatitudes as though they are a new set of Ten Commandments.

II. The Beatitudes are not a list of rules and regulations for us, but rather a description -- really, truly, first and foremost, of Christ Himself. He is the One Who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that He might obtain for us the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the One Who is truly gentle, meek, and mild, Who by “with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death,” redeemed the entire earth. He is the Merciful One, Who is Mercy itself; He is the Peacemaker, Who brought a true and lasting Peace between God and man. He is the only-begotten Son of God, Who was reviled and persecuted for us, so that we may be righteous in Him.

III. But the Beatitudes are also a description, not only of Christ, but of us. The Beatitudes are a description of the life which Christ lives in and through you. When you were baptized into Christ, you became a new creation in Christ. In your Baptism, you were dressed in the pure white robes of Christ. You are a saint.

In the lives of the faithful departed saints, we see that blessed reflection of Christ Himself, Who lived and shined His Light through them. Let us not forget that we, too, in Christ, become **a living reflection** of God's grace to others, that they might be blessed by the example of our faith, lives, and work.

In the same way as the Frankenmuth colonists were Pastor Loehe's "epistle" to the American Indians of Michigan; you are a "living epistle" of Christ to your neighbors.

In the Lord's Prayer, our Lord teaches us to pray, “Thy kingdom come.” With these words, we ask God to (A) give us His Holy Spirit so that we believe His Word and lead godly lives; (B) bring many others in

His kingdom of grace, His Church; and (C) use us to extend His kingdom of grace.

Every time you pray the words our Lord taught us to pray, you are praying that God would make and use you as a “living epistle.” Whenever and however you share the love of God in Jesus Christ by your words and your actions, God shines through you to bring others to Christ.

Then, you can direct them to the Author and Finisher of our faith - - our Lord Jesus Christ. We can encourage them to repent, to have their sins forgiven through baptism and to receive the Lord’s Supper every time its celebrated. We can encourage them to search the Scriptures daily to know God’s will and plan for their lives. We can help them develop a rich prayer life and to attend worship at church for Christian fellowship.

Fellow saints of {Zion} Concordia Church, let us use this celebration of All Saints’ to remember those saints that God used as “living epistles” to touch and direct our lives. And, let us pray that God would give us grace to follow in their train, that we too may be “living epistles” of God’s grace in Christ, so that by our Christian life and piety, all people will come to recognize how pleasant it is to have fellowship with Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.