

November 1 (All Saints)

In today's Gospel from Matthew 5 Jesus has just finished healing whole crowds of sick people. Perhaps he is tired by now. In any case we are told that he went up a mountain and sat down and his disciples came to him and he began to teach them. What does Matthew want us to see in this description? He wants us to see Jesus as the new Moses who now gives his new and definitive definition of the Law, the Torah. Moses went up the mountain to receive the Law or Torah from God. Jesus goes up the mountain to give his new and definitive understanding of the Law, of the Torah. This teaching will take up three chapters (5, 6 and 7). It begins with what we usually call the Beatitudes (Blessed are the poor in spirit...). Then Jesus gives six new ways of living which surpass what Moses had taught. Moses said you cannot kill, but I say you cannot be angry with your brother or sister. Moses said you cannot commit adultery, but I say you can't look with lust at another person. Moses allowed you to divorce for many frivolous reasons, but I forbid it except under the most extreme circumstances. Moses said you shall not swear falsely under oath, but I tell you not to swear at all. Moses said that just retribution could be taken: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say you should turn your cheek to the one who offends you. Moses taught

you to love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I tell you to love your enemy.

Jesus is claiming supreme authority here. He is giving a new and definitive of the Torah, the divine law given to Moses. And he tells his hearers that if they accept his new way of living, they will be blessed and they will be light in the world and salt for their society. But why does he offer this new way of living? Because it reflects his understanding of what God, his Father, is like, and therefore what he is like. And he wants his disciples to be like himself and the Father. It is Jesus' understanding of God which produces this new interpretation of the Divine Law, of the Torah. God is merciful and all-suffering. God is kind and forgiving. God does not respond to evil with evil. Therefore you, Jesus now says to his disciples, must be like God. You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. And if you are, you are blessed, because you will enter into the Kingdom of your Father.

It might not be a bad idea for us to re-examine our understanding of God. Sometimes we older Catholics tell stories about cruel priests and nuns we knew in our childhood. Did we therefore grow up with the idea that God must be like these priests and nuns? If we did, that is a shame. Now we must relearn what God is like, and

then we will understand why it makes sense to live as meek, poor, humble people, for such is God, such is Jesus, and we must be like them.

We celebrate the saints today. We celebrate those men and women who grasped what Jesus taught about his Father in these three chapters of Matthew's Gospel and then tried to live out this understanding of God and Jesus in their own lives. Sometimes it led them to do extraordinary things---like Father Damien serving the lepers for eighteen years and Mother Teresa serving the poor and dying in the streets of Calcutta for half a century.

We have not done something extraordinary like that. Or have we? What about parents who serve sick children for years upon years? What about children who serve elderly parents for years upon years? What about people who have worked all their lives in an honest and faithful way? What about spouses who have struggled to love each other well for decades upon decades? These are ordinary, but at the same time extraordinary, ways of living the beatitudes, of being poor, meek, humble and pure of heart. There are more saints among us than we realize, and they keep our society and our church going. They are the salt of the earth; they are the light of the world.

We don't have to look any farther than our own daily lives in order to find sanctity. And sometimes people are anonymous saints. That is, they have no idea of how well they are living their lives. They think it is just ordinary. They are just doing what they have to do, they will tell us. But in doing what they have to do they are doing what God has given them to do, and they are becoming like God himself, like Jesus himself who simply did what he had to do. All that is lacking to these anonymous saints is simply the explicit consciousness on their part of what God and Jesus are like. They have not yet formulated in their minds and hearts what the true God is like, what Jesus is like. That is lacking, but the actions and therefore the actual sanctity are not. But how their light would shine even more brightly if they, if we, could realize why we are living in this beautiful way. It is because God is such and Jesus is such and calls us to be such too.

God, help me to understand and believe in You as the self-emptying lover so that my life may follow suit. Jesus, help me to follow you in your self-emptying love so that, having shared in your cross, I may also share in Your glory.