

Sunday of All Saints

Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38, 19:27-30

32 Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. **33** But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. **37** He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. **38** And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. **27** Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?” **28** So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **29** And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. **30** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Today the Church has us continue to consider the reality and impact of Pentecost as we reflect on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon mankind through the Apostles, on this ‘*great cloud of witnesses*.’ You may have noticed the epistle reading from Hebrews today has been read in the last month several times. The Church will often do this – in exactly the same way the Scripture does it – to emphasize a point. It’s as if She is saying to us: I really want you to get this. And so we ask, what is it she wants us to get?

The reading is the hard but glorious account of the suffering Old Testament saints. The prophets who endured the persecution, torture and martyrdom we would endure after the coming of Christ, yet without having Him, without knowing Him as we do. And while they were without the knowledge of Christ, they were not without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was given selectively to a few who had been called within the nation of Israel to guide the people – and usually attempt to bring them to repentance.

And yet the Apostle is careful to remind us that ‘*God provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us*.’ But if they had the Holy Spirit (as the prophets did), what is it we have today that is better than what they had? Well, let’s look at what it is they did have. They had the Law – which as we see here they were willing to keep even unto death.

But what is it we have that is better than what they had – better than the Law? We have the Gospel. We have God that has come not just to humanity as He did in the Law, but in Christ, God comes into humanity. And He sends the Holy Spirit to fill humanity from the inside out. Now we can achieve (all of us – not just prophets) the perfection of the martyrs that was never accessible to those under the Law. Why? Because the Law was *about* God but it wasn’t God.

The Gospel is God dwelling in humanity, and in Christ, participating in the life in God in the Holy Spirit. As the fathers a few centuries after this would help us understand that His light now comes to us *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit.

They had before them the Law to guide them, we have before us now the Light and grace of God, *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit

What is different about this teaching of Jesus in Matthew we’re considering today is that it is usually sin that weighs us down, these passions that we are unwilling to submit to Him. But here

Jesus shows us obstacles that, in and of themselves, are actually good things. It is not a sin to want peace and agreement with one another and it is certainly not a sin to love our children and our parents – in fact it is a sin not to.

But because we now have the ability to participate in the life of the Trinity of God *the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. He is telling us that now God being in us means we have to be especially careful what else we allow in us. And anything that would obscure God's place in us is now sin. Anything we don't love and submit to, in and through God, now competes with God.

Well we know from the Old Testament that anything we serve in place of God is an idol. That's what idolatry is. It's that which we worship or serve or desire in place of God. But because God is now in us, we now have to look at not only what we externally give our lives to, but just as importantly we have to look in our hearts and see what we internally are giving our lives to. What occupies our thoughts, our emotions – what do we submit our will to?

If it is not God, loved and submitted through God, then it has become sin and the place it occupies – not the people, not children or parents, but the **place** (the importance) the children and parents occupy is what Jesus is talking about.

You see brothers and sisters. Like the prophets of old who accepted pain and even death rather than submit to that which was not God, the saints likewise refused to submit and serve externally or internally anything that was not God. And everything they loved and served in the world – they loved and served through Christ and through the Holy Spirit Who now resides not just among men – but within men.

So what do we have today that is better than what they had that makes us perfect? What has God given us in this life to purify us and perfect us that they didn't have? That allows us to participate in the life of the Holy Trinity? That allows us to do this work?

We have the Cross.

You see, we don't just accept and carry our crosses. We have to use the cross. Christ didn't just submit to the cross – He used the cross. It was used as a weapon for our salvation. As He used for us to put death to death, we have to do for our souls by putting to death all that is death within us. And that is anything and everything that is in the place of God or is not in submission to God...if we want to participate in the life of God that is.

Today we commemorate the memory of the all those who accepted the cross God gave them before there was a cross and those who accepted the cross Christ gave them. But we also celebrate and remember those who used the cross to put to death everything in them that was not of God. Who lived their lives with knowledge and gratitude through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. They're not just heroes of the faith. They are examples and guides, patrons and intercessors.

How does this apply to us? How can we know where we fit in this cloud of witnesses – how we are doing? Are we worthy of them? All we have to do is ask what we love, desire, serve, submit to and seek that is not *of* God or that is not *through* God. And whatever we find that is not, are

we willing to struggle to, as the Apostle Paul teaches us, to bring it into subjection to Christ?
Everything within our lives that is not subject to Him?¹

And what if we don't do it? Well, aside from our understanding of salvation being union with God and this being inseparably linked to our union with God and therefore salvation, there is also the positive incentive.

I've been asked many times, to what extent do I have to give up or surrender or kill that is not of God? Only the extent you want joy, fulfillment, sobriety, stability...

The extent you want true, lasting, unassailable... peace.

¹ 2 Corinthians 10:5