

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Things happen when you become a Christian. You are baptized. Your sins are washed away. You are set apart as God's own child, consecrated to God, reckoned as "a saint," "a holy one." The Spirit enlightened you by this water and the word, and you came to believe. And as we heard last Sunday, St. Paul wrote: this faith is counted to you as righteousness (Rom. 4:22-25), the righteousness of God, the righteousness earned by Jesus Christ and given you by His grace through faith. All *"are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith"* (Rom. 3:22-25). And St. John wrote: *"[E]veryone who thus hopes in [Jesus Christ] purifies himself as [Jesus] is pure."*

Wow! There are a lot of synonyms there or near-synonyms — saint, holy, righteous (righteousness), justified, pure. And synonyms about how we get to be considered a saint, called holy, reckoned righteous or credited with righteousness, accounted pure. And you can hear: none of it is our doing; none of it is cause for our boasting. They're all gift from the giver of every good gift and every perfect gift (James 1:17). God is the One doing the accounting.

We could add one more near-synonym to this list, a word we heard today — blessed. God accounts us as "blessed" — μακάριοι, a word used over and over in these Beatitudes. God pronounces the poor in spirit and the mourning and the meek blessed — now and in the future. Dr. Jeff Gibbs says, "The adjective μακάριος, in Matthew has strong connotations of present ... and future ... *salvation*" (Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary: Matthew 1:1–11:1*, p. 234). We who by faith are accounted saints are also accounted blessed ... both now and in the age to come.

If you read only the Revelation to St. John, you would surely get the impression that to be a saint, you had to have died and been gathered into the heavenly realms. *"Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* You might think that you had to have fulfilled your confirmation pledge to suffer all even death rather than fall away from the faith to be a saint, that as in days of old, you had to have suffered martyrdom to put on that white robe of heaven. The hymns we sing for All Saints give that impression, too, for they are hymns of the Church Triumphant, sung about those who have realized their eternal victory.

But that impression is wrong. The white robe signifying our sainthood, though unseen, adorns us even now. The Psalmist cries out, *"let your saints shout for joy"* (Ps. 132:9). They are living saints, believers accounted holy by God. Similarly, St. Paul addresses the saints in the various churches of Asia Minor; he is

speaking to the believers there, righteous through faith in Christ Jesus. And when Jesus speaks of the blessed ones in the Beatitudes, He is speaking to believers, too, saints on earth, men and women, brothers and sisters reckoned as holy ones in the Holy One of God, through faith in Him.

Blessed, Jesus calls these saints; but then He provides what seems to be a picture just the opposite of what we desire or expect of someone blessed: poor, sad, meek, hungering and thirsting, persecuted. It's common to be greeted by someone, "Good morning, Pastor. How are you?" My answer commonly is "I'm fine," or "I'm doing well," "How are you?" And often, the person responds, "I am blessed." And I respond, "Amen," but I feel a bit of shame. I think, "I should have said that."

For regardless of my current circumstance, I am blessed — not necessarily happy as a few translations have it, but blessed. I am blessed ... we are blessed because of Jesus, the one *"who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."* We are blessed because of the incarnate Son of God who *"humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"* (Phil. 2:6-8). We are blessed by *"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, [who] though he was rich, yet for [our] sake he became poor, so that [we] by his poverty might become rich"* (2 Cor. 8:9).

We are blessed, not because He makes us poor or miserable or contemptible, but because we are *"in Christ Jesus."* *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **has blessed us in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless **before him**. In love he predestined us for **adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ**, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has **blessed us in the Beloved**"* (Eph. 1:3-6). *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God."*

Jesus, then, in our Gospel enumerates some of those spiritual blessings, like poverty of spirit: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* Blessed is everyone who casts aside every thought of our own sufficiency before the Lord, who acknowledges that we are "poor, miserable, sinners," who cry out of the depths to the Lord for His mercy, who trust that the Lord hears our cries and draws us up from the pit of destruction and gives us the kingdom of heaven.

We are blessed as we mourn our unworthiness before God, lament our sinfulness, and acknowledge the weakness of our flesh. We are not worthy to have the Lord come under our roof, but we call upon the worthiness of the Lamb who was slain. We come before His altar, clothed in those invisible robes made white in

His blood. We come to receive His gifts given in word and Sacrament and be comforted. And we join together with the holy angels and archangels and the sainted company of heaven in singing the praise of the Lamb.

We are blessed in our humility and meekness, not insisting before God that we do not need His salvation, or that we can attain it on our own, but acknowledging the gift that is ours in Christ Jesus and rejoicing in “*the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*” (Eph. 1:18).

We are blessed in our hungering and thirsting for righteousness, not a righteousness that comes from within, but that is outside of us, *extra nos*, from Christ. “*Increase our faith,*” we pray (Luke 17:5), and He satisfies us by His word preached, by His absolution given, by His body and blood eaten. He strengthens our faith in Him and our fervent love toward one another, which is “*the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*” (Phil. 1:11).

We are blessed as we show mercy, not that our mercy toward others happens because we feel good about ourselves when we love our neighbor, but because God in Christ Jesus has already been merciful to us, and promises even more mercy.

We are blessed as those who are reckoned “*pure in heart,*” with bodies sprinkled clean with pure water, sins washed away. God has created in us a clean heart; He has renewed our spirit (Ps. 51:10). Through baptism, our heart is no longer a heart of stone, but a heart of flesh (Eze. 36:26), beating with faith in the Son and in the resurrection promise that we will indeed see God with our own glorified flesh and renewed eyes (Job 19:26-27).

In Christ, we are blessed to be “*peacemakers.*” We live in the peace won by Jesus’ cross and resurrection, the peace that is ours through faith. For God, through Christ, has reconciled us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18). But God has also given us the “*ministry of reconciliation*” that we might share this peace to the world as ambassadors of the Prince of Peace.

We are blessed even when we “*are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.*” We’re not happy about it, of course, but when we are reviled and mocked and defamed by the unbelieving world because we take up the cross and follow our King, when we suffer dishonor for the name (Acts 5:41), we can still rejoice, for we know that we are blessed, as Jesus says. We are being accounted worthy in the Lamb. We have been clothed in a righteousness not our own. We are called saints — holy ones in Christ Jesus. We are numbered among the innumerable throng, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, who stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, who sing the eternal new song of praise.

Come, therefore, you baptized, who hope in the Lord, accounted saints, holy, righteous, justified, pure, blessed. Let us join together in joyous song as we receive a foretaste of the heavenly feast, until Jesus comes again in glory to take us to our eternal home. Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come!

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