

By Kathie McLaughlin, CSJ

Place an unlighted candle and matches at the center of the group.

**LEADER:** Let us take a moment to identify something you are wearing or carrying in a pocket or purse that can act as a sign of your spiritual journey or inner life. Hold the object in your hands.

**LEADER:** Place your symbol near the candle, and as you do and if you choose, tell us how the object expresses your spiritual journey. *Pause for sharing.*

**LEADER:** Let us light the candle.

**ALL:** We give thanks for all the saints, those who have gone before us, those who are among us now, especially our families and loved ones who inspire us along the way. Amen.

I have a friend who usually calls me on All Saints Day to wish me a happy feast day. She believes we are all saints. So do I. I wish her a happy feast day right back.

Another friend, Lezlie Oachs, describes an incident in her spiritual journey that helps me realize we live always in communion with Holy Mystery. Or, to say it another way, we live always in the communion of saints.

*Lezlie says, "Sometimes the organized church bothers me so much I can't sit inside, but I don't go far....I just sit outside on the curb."*

# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

*There's plenty of company on the curb, and because we haven't gone far, we still hear the music and prayers. Everything goes God's way and God sorts through it.*

*"When we were little girls, my sister Deann (4) and I (5) got mad at our mom. We packed a little suitcase and told her we were so mad we were running away from home.*

*"That's fine," she said, "Just remember you are not allowed to cross the street."*

*"We went outside and sat on the curb. We were there a long time and then we got scared that someone might try to steal us. So we went back in the house and asked our mom to write a sign that said, 'Please do not steal these children. They are mine.'*

*"When I'm frustrated with the church and can't sit in the building, I sit outside on the curb. But God is sitting right with me and all the others, holding a sign that says, 'Please do not steal these children. They are mine.'"*

Being a saint asks us to reflect critically and creatively on gospel values. Our reflection can lead to actions that require courage and persistence or sitting on the curb for a while.

Our traditions remember many saints whose stories lift us up and give us courage and hope. Everyone has favorites. My own include Catherine of Siena, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, and my own mom (who would laugh in disbelief if she could hear me say that!). A saint lives in communion with God and all God's own and lives out of that relationship.

- What do you think a saint is?
- What saints have inspired and animated your life? How and why have these saints and their stories influenced you?



Blessed are the peacemakers.



Blessed are the sorrowful.



Blessed are the pure of heart.

# GOSPEL

## How can we be as holy as God is holy?



**NARRATOR:** When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the mountainside. After he sat down, his disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

**1:** Blessed are the poor in spirit; the reign of God belongs to them.

**2:** Blessed are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled.

**3:** Blessed are the meek; they shall inherit the land.

**4:** Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall have their fill.

**1:** Blessed are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs.

**2:** Blessed are the pure of heart; they shall see God.

**3:** Blessed, too, the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God.

**4:** Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of holiness; the reign of God is theirs.

**ALL:** Blessed are you when people insult and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward in heaven is great.

Matthew 5.1-12

suggest the many ways Christians through the centuries have embodied these sayings. They challenge us who belong to the communion of saints today to live in ways quite the reverse of profit-motivated values.

The first beatitude asks that the saint be poor in spirit. It directs all of us to recognize the experience of the economically poor and to enter into the difficult condition of the poor, their powerlessness to influence social systems that keep them poor. The saint lives the “preferential option for the poor,” one of the principles of Catholic social teaching.

The second beatitude calls us to accompany people in tragedy and sorrow, to be their comfort.

The third beatitude asks saints to be meek. It promises the whole earth to those with little. This beatitude has caused problems historically in certain types of Christian spirituality. “Meek” has sometimes meant “weak.” Meekness in this beatitude actively recognizes the injustice in which we can find ourselves, does not deny wrongs, and keeps working to make changes that will contribute to healing. The meek saint is not passive.

The fourth beatitude challenges us to act from a deep spiritual realization that all is not well in the world, not all have enough to survive let alone thrive. The saint that

## Saints are beatitude people.

When I have asked people to identify the central message of Christianity, they will say loving God and neighbor, or following the ten commandments. Rarely does anyone’s first response refer to the beatitudes.

The thou-shalts and shalt-nots of the commandments are familiar. We know what it means to keep the Sabbath holy, honor parents, refrain from stealing, killing, lying, committing adultery, and coveting what others have. These actions break and erode the relationships that bind us together as people of God.

Discerning what it means to be poor in spirit, sorrowful, merciful, pure of heart, peacemaking requires more reflection. The

beatitudes expand what the commandments to love God and neighbor ask of us. They challenge us to saintly living.

● How do you describe what the beatitudes ask of a Christian?

● Who do you regard as blessed in our world today?

● What paths to holiness bless people that follow them?

Matthew’s gospel features the beatitudes as the striking beginning of Jesus’ sermon on the mount—eight sayings that surprise our assumptions about whom God blesses.

As the gospel for celebrating All Saints Day, the beatitudes



has an appetite for justice knows it demands action.

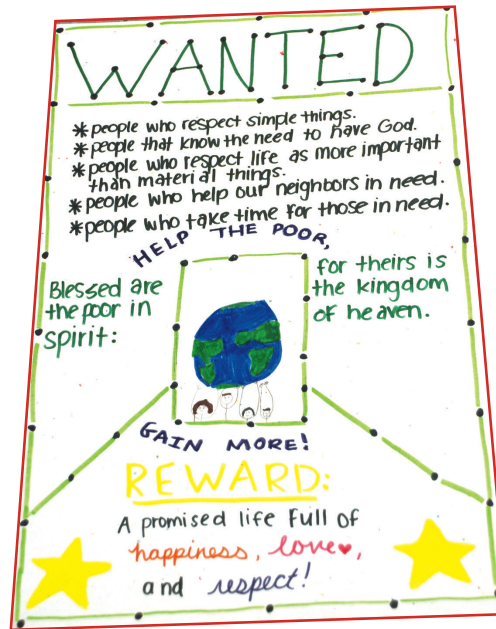
Saints are merciful and will receive mercy, the fifth beatitude promises.

The challenge to be pure of heart has caused problems when people interpret it to refer only to sexual issues, such as moral purity, sexual restraint, refraining from impure thoughts and acts, staying away from occasions of sin (movies, books, TV). It becomes the “sixth” beatitude rather than a challenge to see God in our lives, to be single-minded in our intention to act with love toward all neighbors. The sincere of heart live a deep interior life in communion with God.

The seventh and eighth beatitudes call blessed not those with big salaries and no worries but those who work for peace and bear persecution. They challenge us to join in the work of bringing the reign of God to Earth.

● Which beatitude has special significance for you? Why is it significant?

● How can a person ‘catch the spirit of Jesus?’



● Describe a recent example in which you have experienced someone acting in the spirit of the beatitudes.

The apostle Paul addresses all the baptized as saints in his letters. All are children of God who belong to the communion of saints. We live in communion with Holy Mystery (God). We are inside of God’s life and God is inside of our lives.

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us in letting us be called children of God,” Sunday’s second reading from 1 John proclaims. “What we shall become has not yet come to light!” We have only just begun.

A saint is a person in progress, not a finished product. This feast’s recipe for continuing transformation is:

- one part attending intentionally to the presence of Love in one’s life (prayer);
- one part acting in the spirit of love and justice with all our neighbors (action);
- one part choosing hope that we shall be like Jesus and see him as he is (1 John);
- one part studying and reflecting on the deep message of Jesus (the beatitudes).
- Stir together until the parts all blend in communion.

● What experiences in your life have been sources of communion with God? With your neighbors? With yourself? With Earth?

● Whose insights or convictions do you carry with you?



## Praise to our God.

Sunday’s first reading comes from the Book of Revelation, the last book of the bible. Like the spirituals that arose out of slavery, apocalyptic writing arises among the powerless and persecuted. It conceals its message of hope in code.

Revelation draws on images from Israel’s scriptures to proclaim its message of hope—Jesus will triumph over evil. Jesus is the lamb in Sunday’s first reading. The blood of the lamb smeared on their doorposts saved the firstborn of

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DO SOMETHING

- Stay current on national legislative issues by visiting [networklobby.org](http://networklobby.org), the Catholic lobby on domestic issues. You can write to your senators and representative in Congress on their website.

the enslaved Hebrews from the angel of death in Egypt during the tenth plague.

In Israel's numerology twelve is the number of fullness. The square of the number of fullness, plus three zeros, expresses an uncountable or infinite number. The 144,000 stands for all who follow the lamb, all the children of God in the communion of saints.

The white robes symbolize the baptized. Their seal is the sign of the cross. The baptized have made the journey through death to resurrection in their own lives. They have died to their old lives in the waters of baptism and wear the white robe that symbolizes Jesus' risen life.

The great crowd of saints are in communion with God and one another. They cry out to affirm, "Salvation is from our God...and from the Lamb." They have journeyed through sorrow to comfort, through persecution to joy, through conflict to peace.

## How many are 144,000?

I, John, saw another angel come up from the east holding the seal of the living God. The angel cried out loudly to the four angels who were given power to ravage the land and the seas, "Do no harm to the land or the sea or to the trees until we imprint this seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." I heard

the number of those who were to be marked—144,000 from every tribe in Israel.

After this I saw before me a huge crowd which no one could count from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and the Lamb, dressed in long white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation is from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb."

All the angels who were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures fell down before the throne to worship God. They said: "Amen. Praise and glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, and honor, power, and might to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Then one of the elders asked me, "Who do you think these are, all dressed in white? And where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you know better than I." He told me, "These are the ones who have survived the great period of trial; they have washed their robe and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Revelation 7:2-4,9-14

- How do you imagine communion in God with all the saints and all that is?

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# PRAY

Pray Sunday's second reading from 1 John 3.1-3.

**LEADER:** What love God has bestowed on us in calling us children of God!

**ALL:** We are God's children now; what we shall become has not yet come to light.

**LEADER:** Let us call to mind persons we wish to thank for their example of holiness and pray for them. *Pause for silent reflection.*

**LEADER:** We give thanks for those whose commitments to the common good inspire us. Let us resolve to thank someone who shows us the beatitude way this week.

**ALL:** We give thanks for saints everywhere who live in the spirit of compassion, courage, and love.

**LEADER:** Loving God, you are sacred presence in our lives.

**ALL:** You are beyond all we imagine and closer to us than we are to ourselves.

**LEADER:** We belong to the communion of saints.

**SING:** "When the Saints Go Marching in," and exchange a sign of peace.



## Faith Sharing Tip

### How is our group doing?

Take a few minutes after each gathering to identify what participants like or want to change about their time together. Plan the next session, who will lead what, how to prepare.

*Getting a Grip on Your Group* by Barbara Darling, gives excellent

direction for groups who wish to take a look at how they are doing. Get a copy of this book for each group member. Set aside a few sessions to read chapters aloud together and discuss them. Visit [goodgroundpress.com](http://goodgroundpress.com) to order a copy.