

All Saints Sunday

SAINTS AIN'T QUAIN'T

Luke 6:20-31

All Saints Sunday

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. 'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. 24'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25'Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. 'Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. 26'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

27 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31Do to others as you would have them do to you.

DIAGNOSIS: The Irony of It All

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Whitewashed Saints*

When the faithful gather to hear the good news of Christ forgiving them by his death on a cross, they will listen to this reading, but they will hear it on a day when the “saints” are talked about. The saints will be those of the congregation who have died during the past year, or the saints to them will be defined by the feeling everywhere that saints are the really good people, the really nice people, the people who love their enemies, who do good to those who hate them, who turn the other cheek, who give more help than asked for, and who never ask to have back what others borrowed (vv. 27-30). Even those who died will have been described in such holy terms at their funeral, and will be again when remembered on All Saints Day.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *The Bucket of Whitewash*

The reason the saints, especially those who died, are so well spoken of is because it is our human nature to reward those who have done well. We trust that God rewards the good and punishes the wicked (the law of retribution). Why, this is even what Jesus is talking about when he says that the good, that is the poor, have the kingdom of God; that the good, that is, the hungry, will be filled; and that the good, namely those who weep now, will laugh (vv. 20-22). The law of retribution-getting what you deserve, getting what's fair-also happens to the wicked, that is the rich, the full, and those laughing now. They will get their proper reward: the rich get nothing new for they already have received their consolation; the full will be hungry; and the laughing will mourn and weep (vv. 24-25). However, if we look closely at the world, we will see that the hungry are not filled, but die of starvation; and that everyone mourns and weeps. That scares us, and we turn back more

desperately to trusting that the good will be rewarded. Which is why we speak so well of the saints, of those who have died. The more we say they are good, the more we feel they are the saints in heaven. And the more we insist on our own good behavior, the more saintly we will be, and so, one day, be saints in heaven, too.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – God Washes Out the Whitewashed

Our treatment of the saints in that the good are rewarded, and our insistence that we be like the saints so that we will be rewarded, shows us that our trust is in “doing good.” Our trust is in God’s way of rewarding the good and punishing the bad. (God would not punish the not-so-good, even they are good enough to be rewarded. We sneak in the idea of rewarding the not-so-good because that is more reassuring and increases the number of people who get rewarded, though it does lower the standard of who is good.) Our trust is not in God. Our trust has switched from being in God to being in God’s law of retribution, in God having to reward the good. We look at our goodness for the cause of reward instead of at the goodness of God being the cause of our reward and hope. God thus lets us go to trust the way of rewarding the good. However, God’s way of rewarding the good defines “good”-the saints-as those who love God most of all. “Good” is not only in how nice we are, in how well we did what was needed to be good, how often we turned the other cheek, loved our enemies, or how generously we gave to those who begged from us. “Good” is loving God most of all. But we have loved-not God-but the way of being good and our own goodness. Since we have not love God, we are not good. We are not saints of God. And the way of retribution, the very thing we wanted, declares us to not be saints. Woe to us, is the judgment now. Woe is God’s sentence of death on those who do not love God most of all. The very system we trusted to reward us is the system that

condemns us and kills us.

PROGNOSIS: The Cross of It All

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *The Suffering Saint*

Jesus, the Son of God, starts a new way to be a saint. He creates this new way by dying on a cross. He does not just die on a cross. He dies on a cross for our sake to give us forgiveness. The way of retribution kills him, for he takes our lack of goodness, our lack of saintliness, and makes it his own. So God's way of retribution does its work and condemns him to death. The law is fulfilled. God then raised Jesus from the dead! God raised Jesus to prove that Jesus had died for us so that we could be forgiven, made righteous, and given-not rewarded-eternal life. Also, the way of retribution, loving itself most of all, did not love God most of all. Most of all, it did not love God by killing Jesus, the Son of God; so the way of retribution had to face its own penalty, and it also was sentenced to death. The way of retribution does not get to be a part of the new way to be a saint. It does not get to be part of the newness of life Jesus gives to those who trust him.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) – *Saints Stuffed with Faith*

The death and rising of Jesus are given to us. By faith in him, God declares that it is as if we too died and have been raised. For Jesus' sake, God gives us Jesus' goodness, which is his death on the cross. God is righteous and good by making us righteous and good through faith in Christ. We are given faith in Christ's forgiveness-a power greater than God's own way of retribution or reward. By faith in Christ we now love the Son of God most of all, who gives us a forgiving God who loves us most of all. The saints are those reward-loving people who now trust Christ more than reward.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Stuffed Saints *Serve Their Favorite Good to Others*

By faith in Christ we hear the gospel lesson in a new way, through Christ's forgiveness for us. By faith in Christ we see the new way of Christ's forgiveness, that he gives goodness even to those who do not deserve it. Those who have died need not be described as more good than they really were. They are described as people Christ died for. Those who strive to be saint-like-better than others-find relief in being given the saintliness of Christ. Thus, we can give up striving for sainthood and instead befriend the poor, not in order to gain a reward or to give them a reward because of what they have endured, but to give them mercy and love from Christ. Since the poor will also include people who do not love Christ, to treat them only with the reward they deserve will not ultimately save their life. We get to give them a gift. We get to make them saints. We make them saints by giving them Christ's forgiveness and his crucified love. Because Christ and we love the hungry saints, we will feed them; because Christ and we love saints who are poor, we will give them the kingdom of God; because Christ and we love them, we will comfort them and make them laugh. Even when enemies hate us, we will love them because of Christ on a cross; when we are cursed, we will respond with Christ's forgiveness. For we do not live by retribution anymore. When someone borrows from us, we are free to let them keep it, for our goodness is not in owning, but in Christ who frees us to give; when someone begs from us, we can be generous, not for the sake of our goodness, but for the sake of their need. We do such "saintly" things, not so that we can be rewarded as saints, but because we are already saints-people who look like Christ on a cross, people who are forgiven by Christ on a cross, people who trust Christ as their saintliness. We do things to others that we want them to do to us, namely, forgive in Christ's name, to be merciful in Christ's name, to be loving in Christ's name. We give Christ because we

have Christ given to us.