

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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## BLESSED

*and our eternal struggle with worth*

by Drew Downs

We ought to be straight about the different characters of blessing in Scripture. At times it is a reward for good behavior. Other times it is the prerogative of God. But the most famous example is the blessing promised to Abraham and kept through his sons.

Jesus offers a different look at the old concept. Perhaps we ought to call it “Blessed (Jesus’s Version)”. It isn’t so fundamentally different as it is a new

revelation. Something akin to a shift in focus and priority.

Jesus describes blessing in struggle, in lowliness, in poverty and in pain. And when we think of blessing as reward, this makes no sense. But if we think of blessing as a promise to always be there, our sense of blessing shifts. Our sense of hope and joy shifts. And our orientation to our environment shifts. From consuming to creating. Love. And Hope.

# ORDINARY TIME

2023

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### **Saints and Souls**

This week, we observe the principal feast of All Saints Day on Sunday. It is the day in which we remember all of the saints of the church as one august body. It is a old feast of the church, dating back to the early 7th Century.

The focus of the feast is obviously the saints of the church: those persons whose character or actions had such a recognizable impact on the world that the church felt compelled to elevate them, honor them, and set them as an example of faith for us.

Modern convention has us looking for saints in our midst. And our custom, then, is to also remember those we knew but weren't canonized as saints into the Great Cloud of Witnesses, but we assume ought to be there.

While we associate this practice with All Saints Day, it is consistent with the day after All Saints Day: All Souls Day, as the church renamed it All the Faithful Departed. This modern convention of combining the two days into one is fascinating. And brings new light to the purpose of saints.

Let us not focus so heavily on the people we know, however, and return our gaze this week to other people who have come before. People whose witness transcended cities and continents. Or whose vision of God challenges our own. People we like and those we don't. An entire Cloud of Witnesses who can testify to the love of God in every age and in so many different ways. Let us celebrate, honor, and listen with joy, hope, and love.

With love,  
Drew

# ORDINARY TIME

2023

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## FOR SUNDAY

*All Saints Day*

November 1, 2023

### **Collect**

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

# ORDINARY TIME

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## Reflection

These blessings Jesus offers are popularly known as The Beatitudes and represent the stark and passionate beginning of Jesus's famous Sermon on the Mount. We receive this reading in the context of All Saints Day—a principal feast of the church and among the highest of holy days.

The first thing that strikes us when we read this passage, however, is how these are the most unlikely blessings of all time. When we think of blessings, we're no doubt thinking of money, fame, opportunity, health, hope. We aren't thinking about meekness and suffering.

It also has an interesting orientation. The more you read them, the less they sound like descriptions of person groups who receive blessings and more like patterns of behavior that are *inherently* blessed. This may be startling to the person who associates blessing with rewards given to *kinds* of people or with being in the right in-group.

Jesus speaks of blessedness in a fresh way—even for those of us who have read this countless times. It remains fresh and novel. He is speaking of a blessedness that we still struggle to share in.

This sense of blessedness, of being blessed in the midst of struggle—internal and in a challenging environment—is less reward as it is fuel for a journey, protection from a storm, or even the simple reminder that we're on the right path. The assurance that we're doing the right things when the world can't offer us that.

Even that our living will always end in death—and some sufferings will hasten it! But even in that, too, we are blessed by God's grace. This week, as we remember all of the saints and souls, let us do so with Christ's everlasting hope. With the reminder of our blessing in these times. And with the reminder to be beacons of the hope of God's blessing with our neighbors.

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