



The Miracles of All Saints Day!

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY

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Luke 6:20-31

Alexander Papaderous, a Greek philosopher, teacher, and politician is best known for his inspirational story about finding meaning after surviving World War II. It goes something like this. Papaderous was only six years old when World War II began. His home village on the island of Crete had been destroyed, and he was imprisoned in a concentration camp. When the war ended, he became convinced his people needed to let go of the hatred the war had unleashed. To help the process, he founded an institute for peace and understanding that embodied the horrors and hatreds unleashed by the war. One day, while taking questions at the end of a lecture, Papaderous was asked, *"What's the meaning of life?"* There was nervous laughter in the room. It was such a weighted question. But Papaderous answered it. He opened his wallet, took out a small, round mirror and held it up for everyone to see. During the war he was just a small boy when he came across a motorcycle wreck. The motorcycle had belonged to German soldiers. Alexander saw pieces of broken mirrors from the motorcycle lying on the ground. He tried to put them together but couldn't, so he took the largest piece and scratched it against a stone until its edges were smooth, and it was round. He used it as a toy, fascinated by the way he could use it to shine light into holes and crevices. He kept that mirror with him as he grew up, and over time it came to symbolize something very important. It became a metaphor for what he might do with his life. He wrote: *"I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have, I can reflect light into the dark places of this world—into the black places in the hearts of men—and change some things in some people."* He goes on to say, *"Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life."*

On All Saints Day, we too, may wonder about the meaning of life. We may reflect on the meaning of our lives. Or the meaning of a loved one's life? We might also ask: *"What is a saint?"* Or *"what does it mean to be a saint?"* Basically, a saint

is one who is "*holy, kind, or virtuous.*" They are the "*blessed of God.*" The verses that come before our gospel lesson tell us something about who Jesus considered a saint to be.

Jesus had been praying to God all night on a mountain. In the morning, he calls his followers and chooses twelve of them to be his disciples. Then they all come down from the mountain where they meet up with a multitude of people. They are from Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon. Furthermore, we find ourselves included in verse 27 as Jesus says, "*But I say to you are who are listening.*" Does that not include us? Did we not listen to the gospel this morning? All these people, including us, are the saints. Jesus' audience wants to hear Jesus and be healed in body and mind and spirit. They try to touch him because they want some of Jesus' power. Jesus heals them. And then he begins to preach what it means to be a saint. "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*" Jesus doesn't tell them how to get to heaven. He calls them to hear, listen, and act on behalf of the poor, imprisoned, and grieving because they are blessed. And he does the same for us, as well. Those who are more fortunate are to care for those who are less fortunate. Jesus calls us to become faithful and effective agents of God's reign right here and now! His words are prophetic, disquieting, compelling us to ask, "*Who me?*" And they are challenging!

The rules for engaging in Jesus' reign stand in sharp contrast to those who presume they have rights because they are prosperous, have wealth, abundant food, and good times. They think they are blessed "*because they earned it!*" But Jesus identifies the blessed sharply by contrasting those who are blessed and those who are judged. "*Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation!*"

All Saints Day is a way of witnessing to God's way of blessing the world. It is not simply reinforcing "the entitled." Or keeping things as they are. Rather it reveals God's justice fulfilled in mercy. It is not an ideological agenda or a political platform. It is a vision of God's reign which Jesus embodies. And we are invited into this holy venture. Jesus implores us to: Love our enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. Give to the poor. The bottom line is: Do to others as you would have them do to you. That is what we call: *The Golden Rule*. That is how we, the ones who are blessed, shine the light of God's grace into the darkness of our world. Unlike Jesus' Sermon on Mount in Matthew, Luke places Jesus on a level plain. He is not a king over us, but with us. In Matthew Jesus says, "*You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God.*" But in Luke, Jesus simply says, "*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*" In other words, be the light for others, as you would like them to be the light for you. And yet, whether we read these beatitudes in Matthew or Luke, we can't seem to accomplish either of these things on our own. We need Christ's light and the Holy Spirit to help us because Jesus' words to us are so difficult for us.

The First Miracle of All Saints Day is about God and what God expects of the saints. It not about perfection. None of us are perfect and God doesn't expect us to be. Rather, it is about Jesus' bold vision of life and community. It is a vision that expresses the values and commitments of God's reign. His vision of grace is unconditional. It treats different--and difficult--others with unreciprocated kindness. Jesus' purpose and mission is to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captive, bring recovery of sight to the blind, and to liberate the oppressed. It is a prophetic mission. It is a mission that changes the lived experiences of those who believe and follow him. It is about God, whose holy reign is at work in the lives of people like us.

The second miracle of All Saints Day is about us and how our lives are transformed. As forgiven sinners, we are called and sent to be ordinary saints in God's world. We are called to enact God's love and justice, and to shine God's light into the dark places of our broken world. Sometimes this happens in surprising ways.

On occasion, I have spoken about my brother, Bill. His is a tragic story and I found it difficult to find the light emanating from him. But others did see God's light shining from him. He played the trumpet for his church. He had a loving relationship with his daughter, Sarah. And he helped so many people who were struggling with addiction. He listened to them. Talked with them. And walked with them when they were struggling. At his funeral, there were so many people from AA who told us how Bill had helped them through tough times. Woe to me, who found him threatening and scary. I was unable to relate to him; or understand him; or give him the love and support he so wanted from me. But God was able to shine the light through my brother's broken pieces to others.

The third miracle of All Saint Day is about the world. It is about the way God works through us to transform our communities and the world. I think if it wasn't for Bill, I may never have ended up in ministry. God uses the tragedies in our lives to shine a guiding light for us and our families. God transforms our hearts and our lives for the good of others. God brings meaning and purpose to our lives. Which brings us back to Papaderous, who took a broken piece of mirror, transformed it, and used it to shine the light into the dark places the people of Crete who had experienced devastation in WWII. He brought hope and healing to their world.

So, as you light a candle this morning for your loved ones, take a moment to think about how God's light shined through them. Remember how God transforms our lives through others' lives. And envision how God might shine through your life for the sake of someone else. Someone who is hungry, lonely, or unhappy. For we all have a purpose. We are God's

beloved saints. All our lives have meaning. So, let's not lose sight of the fact that today, God calls us to act, to bear witness to the kingdom of God! The Kingdom of God is not just some abstract theological term or place we fly away to when we die. The Kingdom of God breaks through when we love our enemies. It takes hold when we do good to those who hate us. It comes alive when we bless those who curse us. It shines brightly when we pray for those who abuse or mistreat us. It shows up when we honor the request of beggars. And when we live our lives by the principle of *"Do to others as you would have them do to you."* We are reminded we are citizens of the kingdom. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the light in this dreary world.

In Jesus' name, amen.