

All Saints Day (Year A)

What is it like to live as God's saint? This week's readings affirm that all who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. God's saints today – including all who are baptized into Christ – are called to look ahead, to know the hope to which God calls. And God's saints are called to live now in the presence of God's promises, working toward their fulfillment.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

This passage begins the first of Jesus' five major sections of teaching in Matthew. Matthew 5 is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, which might be thought of as Jesus' vision of life in God's reign. The Sermon on the Mount concludes with Matthew 7:28. The setting is on a mountain, where Jesus is seated and teaching the disciples. Noting Matthew 7:28, however, one can imagine the crowds mentioned in verse 1 craning their necks to overhear Jesus' words.

In Matthew, the gospel writer sets up comparisons between Jesus and Moses. Moses encountered God on a mountain and received God's Law to give to the Hebrew people. In these verses, Jesus speaks from the mountain to teach about God's reign.

Verses 3–12 are called "The Beatitudes," pronouncements of blessings. What Jesus says about those who are blessed by God likely surprised and shocked those who heard it. Jesus teaches that God's blessings come to those who are ignored by society, those who are viewed as outcasts, and those who are willing to work for what God values. Verses 3–6 speak of the relationship between believers and God; verses 7–12 speak of the relationship between believers and the world.

Jesus teaches that poverty of spirit, meekness, longing for God's righteousness, showing mercy, relying on God, and working for peace may come into the lives of believers. Jesus speaks a word of promise into such situations: the favour of God's reign means comfort, inheritance, fulfillment, mercy, and eternal relationship with God. The Beatitudes close with Jesus' encouragement to his followers to rejoice. Others may verbally or physically abuse and persecute them for living lives of faithful service to God and neighbour, but God has the ultimate power.

Jesus' words call us and all the saints to gaze forward to the time when God's promises will be fulfilled. Those who weep now will laugh. Those who are hungry now will be filled. Those who are poor now will receive the riches of God's inheritance. With this future firmly in our gaze, the obstacles to faith become smaller, the path easier to navigate.

The writer of **1 John 3:1–3** proclaims that it is God's love that makes one a child of God, and calls on the readers of this letter – then and now – to claim this identity with hope and faith.

Written to encourage Christians facing persecution in the Roman Empire late in the first century CE, the book of Revelation is a vision of the ultimate fulfillment of God's reign. **Revelation 7:9–17** is the writer's vision of multitudes from every nation – including those who have suffered in their faith – coming to live in God's reign. God's gift of salvation to all peoples is received by God's people with endless, wondrous worship.

Psalm 34:1–10, 22 is part of a wisdom teaching about God's goodness. There is no direct address to God, rather the psalmist calls for all to "taste and see" that God is good. God delivers; God saves; God redeems the lives of God's faithful saints.

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All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for the blessings God has given us to share with others. When we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. We have a role to play, along with the saints of old, in the story of God's saving work. What might we do, as individuals and as the church, to welcome all people to live in God's promise?



Focus Scripture
Matthew 5:1–12

Additional Scriptures
Revelation 7:9–17
Psalm 34:1–10, 22
1 John 3:1–3

Eternal God, you know our yesterdays, our todays, and our tomorrows. Thank you for working in the lives of all your saints. Give us faith to engage the world according to your ways, living in hope and confidence of your saving love. Amen.

The Focus for Ages 12–14

Celebrity worship is often a common occurrence in the lives of young teenagers. They cover the walls of their rooms with posters of their favourite movie stars, bands, or athletes. These idols can influence a young teen's clothing and hair style, speech, even values. Adolescents are in a critical period of observing life and making judgments about those who might be role models for them. Some of these secular idols do provide positive role models for youth to follow as their own identities are emerging.

On this All Saints Day, young people will be encouraged to think about those who have been their mentors and role models, especially those who have encouraged them as they grow in faith and their relationship with

God, each other, and the world. They will also be encouraged to reflect on the ways in which they too are or can be “saints” in whom God's love and God's way can be seen.

With their natural compassion and care for others, young teens may be able to identify with Jesus' teaching that God's blessings come to those who are ignored by society and those who are viewed as outcasts. Some group members may have had very real experiences of being “persecuted” by bullies or experiencing those who “utter all kinds of evil against them.” Be aware of this as the focus passage is explored. Pray that as young people reflect on Jesus' teaching about God's realm, they will be open to new understandings and discover new possibilities for working for peace and justice.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the scriptures, Psalm 34:1–10, 22, Matthew 5:1–12, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Prepare a worship area with *white cloth*, *white pillar candle*, and *Bible*.
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.
- ❑ Bring *Bibles*, *candlesnuffer*, *matches*, and *CD player*, if possible.

Gather

- ❑ Bring *copies of the resource sheet “Speaking of Blessings”* (p. 5).
- ❑ Bring individual *lengths of newsprint* and *felt markers*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *newsprint*.

Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Reflection:** *copies of the section “Personal reflection” on the resource sheet “Saints” (p. 6), pencils or pens*
- ❑ **Game:** *copies of “Saints and heroes” section and directions for “All Saints game” from the resource sheet “Saints” (p. 6); cut saint names section apart, making sure there are at least two of each name.*
- ❑ **Poster:** *poster board, felt markers in different colours*



All Saints Day (Year A)

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To discover that we are saints as we work for peace and justice.

Gather

Welcome the young people and invite them to share some experiences from the past week.

Gather around the worship table and light the candle. Point out the white colour in the worship area, explaining that today we celebrate All Saints Day and remember all of the saints in the history of our church and present today.

Pray Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Speaking of Blessings,” form two groups, and invite groups to read alternate lines of the “Opening prayer,” based on **Psalm 34:1–4, 8**.

Sing or listen to a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Making connections

Invite young people to think of someone they admire. This could be someone famous, such as a movie star, athlete, or world leader, or it might be a favourite relative, sibling, or friend. Distribute sheets of newsprint and invite them to draw a person-shaped outline on their papers, adding facial features, hair, clothing, and a distinctive item that symbolizes the person they admire. Ask young people to take turns introducing these heroes and naming some characteristics they admire most, and how these people have inspired them.

Engage

Setting the scene

The focus passage for All Saints Day this year, from the gospel of Matthew, is the beginning of the first of Jesus’ five main teachings recorded in this gospel. Jesus teaches about practical things such as prayer, money, and dealing with worries, and offers a picture of what life looks like in God’s realm. In the previous chapter, the gospel writer describes Jesus’ travels through Galilee, where he taught in the synagogues and cured many people. Read **Matthew 4:25** and **Matthew 5:1–2**. The teaching that we will read today is part of what is called the “Sermon on the Mount.”

Moving into the story

Invite young people to participate in a choral reading of **Matthew 5:3–12**. Have the whole group say together “Blessed are...” at the beginning of each verse, with group members taking turns reading the rest of each verse. Have them read verse 12 in unison. Draw a chart on a sheet of newsprint, with one column labelled “Who” and the other labelled “What.” Invite youth to look at each verse, identifying who Jesus is referring to (for example, “the poor in spirit”) and the blessing each group receives.

■ Who does Jesus name as those who will receive God’s blessings?

Invite a volunteer to read another translation of the focus scripture reading, found on the resource sheet “Speaking of Blessings,” substituting the word “God” for “he,” “him,” and “his” in the listing of blessings.

■ Who is named in this version as those who will receive God’s blessings?

■ What is promised to each group?

■ How would each blessing be God’s gift to each group?

This teaching could be described as Jesus’ vision of what life is like in God’s kingdom, or God’s realm. Those groups that Jesus identifies may not be those whom we would identify as saints, or heroes.

■ What do you think Jesus is saying about God in this teaching?

■ What do you think Jesus is saying about how we are to live in God’s realm?

Invite young people to look again at verse 12, and think of times when they might have experienced being persecuted.

- **What do you think it means to be persecuted “because of Jesus” or for Jesus’ sake?**
- **How can these last verses of Jesus’ teaching encourage us to live in God’s way?**

Connecting scripture with life

This reading from the gospel of Matthew is sometimes called the “Beatitudes,” which means “a statement about those who are blessed.” Invite young people to think about those who have encouraged, supported, and celebrated with them as they tried to live in God’s way.

- **How has this teaching of Jesus helped you to understand better some of the things we are called to do as we live in God’s way?**

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, a time to remember all those people, long ago and today, who live fully in God’s way and work patiently and hopefully to make a difference in the world. We are also saints when we share God’s love with others and work for peace and justice in the world.

- **In what acts of peace and justice might you participate this week?**

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Reflection** As saints we are called to follow Jesus’ teaching about showing mercy, relying on God, and working for peace. Distribute copies of the section “Personal reflection” on the resource sheet “Saints” and review the definitions. Invite young people to write their own definitions of a saint and make a list of those they consider to be saints. Option: share these thoughts in pairs, or as a whole group.
- **Game** Invite young people to play a game to learn more about some of the saints in the past whose lives have demonstrated living in God’s way. Distribute the slips of paper with saints’ names (each person can have more than one slip); review the game described on the resource sheet “Saints” and play together for a while. Then invite young people to tell each other about “their” saints, reading the



information on the slips, and adding anything they might also know about these people. Ask group members to name others that they would consider to be saints today, or in the past, and explain why they would consider these people to be saints.

- **Poster** On All Saints Day we celebrate the life and work of God’s saints in the world. Invite young people to create a poster of saints by drawing a person-shaped outline on a sheet of poster board and writing, inside the shape, words and phrases from Jesus’ teaching in the focus scripture that characterize a saint, such as humble, merciful, pure heart, makes peace. Around the outline of the person-shape have them print the names of saints, both from long ago, and today (such as world leaders, church workers, mentors, including their own names).

Bless

Gather around the worship area. Invite young people to reflect for a few moments on Jesus’ teachings about blessings.

Pray Offer the following prayer, or one of your own.

O God, help us not just to talk but to act,
not just to think and dream, but to do.
Help us to remember that we can be your
saints,

working for peace and justice in our community and in the world. Amen.

Sing or listen to a blessing song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Sending out Close the session by offering each person the following blessing, “(Name), may God bless you, and may you be a blessing to others.”

Reflect

What insights did youth express about what it means to be a saint, one who shows us what it means to live in God’s way? In what ways do

they see themselves as saints as they follow Jesus’ teachings?



Speaking of Blessings

Opening prayer

I will always praise the Lord.

With all my heart, I will praise the Lord.

Let all who are helpless, listen and be glad.

Honour the Lord with me! Celebrate his great name.

I asked the Lord for help,

And he saved me from all my fears.

Discover for yourself that the Lord is kind...

Come to him for protection, and you will be glad.

Psalm 34:1–4, 8

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the side of a mountain and sat down. Jesus' disciples gathered around him, and he taught them:

God blesses those people who depend only on him.
They belong to the kingdom of heaven!

God blesses those people who grieve.
They will find comfort!

God blesses those people who are humble.
The earth will belong to them!

God blesses those people who want to obey him more than to eat or drink.
They will be given what they want!

God blesses those people who are merciful.
They will be treated with mercy!

God blesses those people whose hearts are pure.
They will see him!

God blesses those people who make peace.
They will be called his children!

God blesses those people who are treated badly for doing right.
They belong to the kingdom of heaven!

God will bless you when people insult you, mistreat you, and tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me.

Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven. People did the same things to the prophets who lived long ago.

Matthew 5:1–12

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Saints

Personal reflection

Who is a saint?

“A saint is a holy or godly person.”

“A saint is one of the blessed in heaven.”

“A saint is a very patient and unselfish person.”

“A saint is someone who has made a difference in the world.”

My definition...

A saint is _____

I think _____ is a saint because _____

I think _____ is a saint because _____

I think _____ is a saint because _____

ALL SAINTS GAME

1. Distribute names of well-known saints among the group, making sure that each name is used more than once.
2. Arrange chairs (one fewer than the number of players) in a circle.
3. One person acts as caller, standing in the middle of the group while the others sit on the chairs. The caller calls out a saint's name (for example, "St. Patrick!") and all players who have been given that name have to switch places. The caller also tries to claim an empty seat.
4. The one left without a seat becomes the next caller. Occasionally a caller can shout "All Saints Day!" and everyone must claim a new seat.
5. Continue playing until all names have been called.

Game taken from *Youth Spirit*, compiled by Cheryl Perry. Published by Wood Lake Books, © 1997. Used with permission.

Saints and heroes

Cut these strips apart and distribute among group members.

Saint Patrick: missionary to Ireland; started churches and schools and cared for all people.

Saint Nicholas: bishop in Turkey; known for helping children and youth.

Saint Catherine of Siena: known as a peacemaker in the church.

Archbishop Oscar Romero: helped the poor people of Central America.

Helen Keller: through perseverance against blindness and deafness she became a symbol of courage and hope.

Mother Teresa: spent her life caring for the dying in India.