

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 15–18

Young people are bombarded with messages about how they should live, both from parents and peers, as well as from popular figures and the media. Pop singers, movie stars, athletes are today's heroes and icons, people that teenagers look up to and want to emulate in appearance and behaviours, if not lifestyle. As older teens search for their own identity in a complex world they sometimes need to "try on" a variety of identities, attitudes, even appearances as they set their own priorities.

In this All Saints Day session, young people will be encouraged to think about those people who are their mentors and role models, especially those within the church who have modelled a godly life and encouraged them in their faith journeys. They will also be encouraged to reflect on the ways in which

they, like all of God's people, are also saints, helping to do God's work of love in the world.

Jesus' teachings about blessings in the gospel reading for this day can offer guidelines for young people as they explore what it means to be the caring, compassionate, forgiving people of God. A challenging discussion might arise around the verses which speak of persecution. Some members of the group may have had very real experiences of being reviled and persecuted by bullies, and may need help in exploring the meaning of Jesus' teaching in their own lives as well as in the historical context of the early church. Pray that as young people reflect on Jesus' teachings about blessings in God's realm, they will be open to new understandings and to discovering possibilities for service in the name of 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.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of the resource sheet "You're Blessed"* (p. 5).

Respond

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

- ❑ **Reflection:** *copies of the resource sheet "Reflecting on Jesus' Teaching"* (p. 6), *pencils* or *pens*
- ❑ **Blessing bracelets:** *beads in four colours*, *leather* or *plastic lacing*
- ❑ **Poster:** *poster board*, *felt markers in different colours*

Bless

- ❑ Bring *slips of paper and pencils*.



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 Invite young people to form two groups to read alternate verses of **Psalm 34:1–3, 9** as a gathering prayer.

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

Making connections

Invite young people to think of those who are, or have been, role models. Discuss together the following questions:

- **What characteristics do these people have that you really admire?**
- **How have these people inspired you?**
- **What makes someone a positive role model?**

Engage

Setting the scene

In the chapter before this day's reading from Matthew, the gospel writer describes Jesus' travels through Galilee, where he taught in the synagogues and cured many people. Read **Matthew 4:25**. Explain that the *Decapolis* was a group of ten gentile (non-Jewish) cities east of Galilee. The writer of the gospel of Matthew grouped a collection of Jesus' teachings into chapters 5–7 and this day's reading is the beginning of the first of five major speeches. In these, Jesus teaches about practical things such as prayer, marriage and divorce, money, and dealing with worries, and offers a picture of what life looks like in God's realm. Read **Matthew 5:1**. The teaching that we will read today is part of what is called the "Sermon on the Mount," a name given to all the teachings in chapters 5–7. In the Bible, mountains are associated with being in God's presence.

Scripture reading

Distribute sheets of paper, and invite young people to make two columns on their papers, one with the title "Who," and the second with the title "What." As you read **Matthew 5:2–12**, pause after the verses which speak of blessing so that young people can make notes about who Jesus

names (for example, "the poor in spirit") and what is God's blessing for each group. After the reading compare information together.

- **Who are those that Jesus identifies as the ones needing blessing?**
- **What might be the significance of naming these particular groups of people?**
- **In what ways do the blessings that they will receive connect with what they experience?**

Distribute copies of the resource sheet "You're Blessed" and read together this paraphrase of the gospel reading.

- **What new understanding do you have about the blessings of God?**

Jesus' teaching closes with an encouragement to those who will experience persecution.

- **What do you think it means to be persecuted "because of Jesus" or for Jesus' sake?**
- **What encouragement does Jesus offer?**

Jesus offers a vision of what life is like in God's kingdom, or God's realm.

- **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?**

Digging deeper

The reading we have today is sometimes called the “Beatitudes,” which means “a statement about those who are blessed.” The Beatitudes can be divided into two sections: verses 3–6 speak of the believers’ relationship with each other and with God, and verses 7–10 speak of their relation with the world. Invite young people to look again at each of these sections and reflect on the following questions:

- **Who are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted in today’s world?**
- **What words of promise might Jesus offer today?**

Connecting scripture with life

Recall the conversation about role models in the gathering activity and ask young people to now think of those who have been role models of faith, and to reflect on how these people have encouraged and supported them.

- **What have you learned from these people about how to live as a follower of Christ?**

On All Saints Day we recognize that as Christians we are all God’s blessed people, saints. Jesus teaches that meekness, longing for God’s righteousness, showing mercy, relying on God, and working for peace are all part of being God’s people.

- **What might we do, as God’s saints, to show mercy and work for peace and justice?**

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- Reflection** The gospel reading reminds us that in God’s realm there will be comfort, fulfillment, mercy, and a close relationship with God. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Reflecting on Jesus’ Teaching” and invite young people to use the questions to help them reflect on the meaning of Jesus’ teaching for their own lives.
- Blessing bracelets** Invite young people to create bracelets that will remind them of their call to live as God’s people in the presence of God’s promises. Have them each choose four different colours of beads (to represent the words “you” “are” “blessed” “when”) and arrange them in repeating patterns on lengths of lacing, tying knots in between each bead or set of beads.



Encourage them to wear their bracelets, or keep them in a pocket along with a copy of the reading on the resource sheet “You’re Blessed,” as reminders of the call to live in God’s way.

- 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. Distribute slips of paper and pencils and invite young people to complete the sentence “This week I will be a blessing by...” and keep these as reminders of their commitment.

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

O God, help us to be a blessing to others as we have been blessed.

In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

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

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 young people express about what it means to be a saint, one who shows us what

it means in God’s way? In what ways do they see themselves as saints as they follow Jesus’ teachings?



You're Blessed

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions.

This is what he said:

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope.
With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.
Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are — no more, no less.
That's the moment you find yourself proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.
He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

"You're blessed when you care.
At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

"You're blessed when you get your inside world — your mind and heart — put right.
Then you can see God in the outside world.

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight.
That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.
The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

"Not only that — count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.

"You can be glad when that happens — give a cheer, even! — for though they don't like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble."

Matthew 5:1–12

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Reflecting on Jesus' Teaching

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 in working for peace and justice for all.

Reflect on Jesus' teaching in today's reading from **Matthew 5:1–12**. Use the questions below to guide your reflections.

■ **When have you felt at the end of your rope?**

■ **What do you do to help get your inside world, heart and mind, put right?**

■ **When have you felt as if you had lost something very precious?**

■ **When have you been able to demonstrate cooperation instead of competition?**

■ **When have you felt happy about yourself, just the way you are?**

■ **What helps you to stay committed to God and to God's way of living?**

■ **When have you spent time caring for others? What did you do?**

When you have thought about these questions, compose a personal prayer based on your reflections. You might like to make your prayer in the form of an acrostic, with the first letters of each line spelling a word. Choose a word from today's scripture reading, such as "BLESS" and create a prayer line for each letter of this word:

Blessings... help me remember, God, that there are blessings in my life that I'm not aware of.

Living... help me remember, God, to be more careful in my living.

Encouragement... help me remember, God, to cooperate instead of compete.

Speaking... help me remember, God, to be a peacemaker through my words.

Surrounded... O God, I know that your love surrounds me wherever I go and whatever I do.