

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 6–8

Children aged six to eight years will have experienced blessings many times in their lives, and at this age they are usually more open to a wider definition of what blessing means than are many adults. Security in being welcomed into a group activity, joy in caring for a younger child, affirmation from a beloved adult, or excitement at a new learning opportunity – all these and much more are blessings to children this age. Seven-year-old Maia, for example, thought it a gift straight from God when she found an infestation of toads in the basement of her house; her mother couldn't quite see the blessing on her own, but Maia helped her. Many children are also aware that they themselves are a source of blessing to others. Most children, particularly if they live in openly affectionate and affirming homes, will have seen someone's face light up when

they enter a room, or heard joy in another's voice when they say the child's name.

The question of saintly behaviour is a source of confusion for some younger children. While they want to "be good" and are aware of what being "good" might mean at home, school, or church, they are aware that maintaining a record of perfect behaviour is impossible. Fortunately, it is also impossible for the rest of us, and we can do much to model how healthy adults cope when their own haloes slip. At least two things are important on this All Saints Day: acknowledgment of "saintly" lives lived in the pursuit of God's way of love, and recognition that this kind of "saintly" behaviour is an option for all of us. Pray that children everywhere may experience the reality of Jesus' assurance to the children: "You will know God's blessing."

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Bring items for the worship area: *white cloth*, *white pillar candle*, and *Bible* with a bookmark placed in the gospel of Matthew.
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.
- ❑ Bring *candlesnuffer*, *matches*, and *CD player*, if possible.

Gather

- ❑ Bring *gold or yellow paper strips* (approximately 5 x 20 cm/2 x 8 in), *pencils* or *felt markers*, and a *stapler*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring the *resource sheet "You Are Blessed"* (p. 5), *small bell*, and a *stick*.
- ❑ Bring a *special party snack*.

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the necessary materials.

- ❑ **Making peace:** *copies of resource sheet "Blessed Peacemakers"* (p. 6), *crayons*, *pencil crayons*, or *felt markers*
- ❑ **Saint surprises:** *white construction paper*, *white tissue paper*, *white narrow ribbon*, *glue sticks*, *white glue*, *felt markers*, *envelopes*; option: *copy of church pictorial directory*
- ❑ **Display:** *drawing paper*, *art supplies*



All Saints Day (Year A)

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To know that we are blessed to be a blessing.

Gather

Welcome the children and any guests. Bring out the items for the worship area and invite the children to help prepare the space. Point out the white cloth and mention that a white cloth is used on celebration days. Today we are celebrating All Saints Sunday, a time to remember all the people in the past and present who love God and are followers of Jesus.

Opening ritual

Gather the children around the worship focus area and invite a child to light the candle. Say that the light of the candle is a reminder that God is with us in this place, as we gather together to learn about God's way.

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

Pray (invite children to repeat each line after you)

Dear God,
as we gather in this circle today,
help us to learn more about
following in the way of Jesus
and showing your love. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to show that the gathering ritual is over.

Connecting life and theme

On this day, All Saints Day, we honour all the people who are living and all those who have died who have followed Jesus' teachings and lived in God's way. Invite children to name those who have shared God's love with them, and remind them that they are saints too. Invite children to make a garland of haloes as a way of naming some saints. Distribute gold or yellow paper strips and invite children to print one name on each strip, adding the word "Saint" (such as people they know who show God's love, biblical and historical characters). Make sure every child writes his or her own name on a strip. Connect all the strips with a stapler to make a paper chain garland and hang in the worship area.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Matthew. Explain that in today's Bible story we hear about a time when Jesus was teaching people about what it meant to share God's love. In Jesus' teaching we hear the word "blessing." Talk about the word "blessing" and ask the children if they know what it means. When we receive something loving from someone, it's called a blessing. When people do loving things for us, we feel blessed. When we do loving things for others, we are spreading God's blessing. Take two more paper strips and print the phrase, "Blessed to be a blessing" on them. Begin and end the garland made earlier with these strips.

Bible story

Use the resource sheet "You Are Blessed," based on **Matthew 5:1–9, 12**, to tell the story, using the bell.

After the story

Invite children to find a partner and shake hands or make high fives with the partner as they sing each line of the following song. Repeat the song several times, finding new partners each time. Pause after each time of singing the song, asking the group to respond to the question: "How can we pass on God's blessing?"

Sing "We Are Blessed" (tune: "If You're Happy and You Know It")

We are blessed. Jesus tells us, pass it on (*shake hands or make high fives*).

We are blessed. Jesus tells us, pass it on (*shake hands or make high fives*).

We are blessed and we know it,
and we surely want to show it.

We are blessed. Jesus tells us, pass it on (*shake hands or make high fives*).

Celebration snack Invite children to celebrate all the saints who have helped them learn more about God’s love. Say a prayer together and then share a special party snack. Imagine together how group members could encourage one another to live in “saintly” ways.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- ❑ **Making peace** When we work for peace in the world, we are living in God’s way. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Blessed Peacemakers” and invite children to draw or print ways that they can live peacefully and help others to do the same. Encourage them to try one peacemaking idea during the coming week.



- ❑ **Saint surprises** All Saints Sunday is a good opportunity to recognize the saints in your congregation by sending them greeting cards. Together look through the church directory, if possible, and encourage the children to each choose a person. Help them make cards by folding in half a sheet of construction paper. Glue a smaller white rectangle of tissue paper on the front. Then form a cross with white ribbon and

glue on top of the tissue paper. Print a message inside such as “God loves you. You’re a saint!” Help the children address the envelopes for the saints they have chosen and arrange to deliver them or mail them.

- ❑ **Display** Jesus told the people to rejoice because they were part of a great community of people who lived in God’s way of love (verse 12), the community of saints that we celebrate today. Distribute drawing paper and invite children to draw pictures of a community of saints. Who would be there? What would they be doing to show God’s love? Create a collage of these drawings by gluing onto a sheet of poster board. Add a title such as, “A Community of Saints,” and display in the church hall.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to relight the candle. Recall today’s conversation about what it means to be a blessing.

Pray together this prayer or one of your own:

Dear God,
help us, your saints,
to be a blessing in the world. Amen.

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

Send each child out with the words, “(Child’s name), God blesses you, and you are a blessing to others.”

Extinguish the candle.

Reflect

Where did you and the children see signs of God’s blessing during today’s session? Were there any children who struggled to see themselves as blessings?

In what ways did children show they are beginning to realize they are saints of God?



You Are Blessed

(based on Matthew 5:1–9, 12)

Story Tip

Refrain from interpreting the story. Children can leave a story and come back later to it without losing the continuity of the story. They simply fill in the spaces with their imaginations.

(Practice the refrain, “God blesses you.” Each time you ring a little bell, that is the children’s signal to repeat the phrase.)

People. People. People. Everywhere you looked you could see people. There were mothers and fathers. There were children and babies. There were grandparents and uncles and aunts. There were sad people and hurting people. There were happy people and loving people. Everyone was there. Everyone had come to see Jesus.

Jesus looked around at the people’s faces. *(Pause.)* Jesus saw many people who were just beginning to learn about God’s way of love, and many people who wanted to know even more about how to live in ways that pleased God. Jesus turned to the disciples and said,

Look at the people who know how much they still have to learn about God.

When you are ready for God’s way of looking at things, you will know God’s blessing. *(Tap bell.)*

Children: God blesses you.

God wants you to show you everything about a world filled with God’s love.

Look at the people who are grieving about all they’ve lost. When you are sad, you will know God’s blessing. *(Tap bell.)*

Children: God blesses you.

God wants you to be comforted by God’s love.

Look at the people who are quietly listening for a message from God.

When you let God lead, you will know God’s blessing. *(Tap bell.)*

Children: God blesses you.

God wants you to have everything in the world that can’t be bought.

Look at the people who are trying hard to live in God’s way.

When you are hungry and thirsty for a world filled with God’s love, you will know God’s blessing. *(Tap bell.)*

Children: God blesses you.

God wants you to be filled up completely with God’s love.

Look at the people who show love and compassion to others.

When you are caring, you will know God’s blessing. *(Tap bell.)*

Children: God blesses you.

God wants everyone to feel more of God’s love by sharing it with others.

Look at the people who are focused on God.

When you are living in God’s way, you will know God’s blessing. *(Tap bell.)*

Children: God blesses you.

God wants everyone to feel God’s love deep inside and all around.

Look at the people who are helping others to get along with each other.

When you are cooperating together, you will know God’s blessing. *(Tap bell.)*

Children: God blesses you.

God wants everyone to live together peacefully.

When you do all these things as you’re learning to live in God’s way of love, you can be very happy. You are pleasing God, just as all of the prophets and witnesses who lived before you pleased God.

The disciples thought about what Jesus said, and they looked around at the people who had come to hear Jesus teach. They began to see what Jesus meant. They began to see how God wanted them to live. And they wanted to learn even more. Living in God’s way of love, you can be very happy. You are pleasing God, just as all of the prophets and witnesses who lived before you pleased God.

The disciples thought about what Jesus said, and they looked around at the people who had come to hear Jesus teach. They began to see what Jesus meant. They began to see how God wanted them to live. And they wanted to learn even more.



Blessed Peacemakers

Peacemaking is...	Peacemaking is not...
cooperating everyone wins sharing taking turns talking it out	arguing somebody loses keeping everything for yourself always being first fighting

When we work for peace in the world, we are living in God's way.

Draw or print two ways you might live peacefully.

Draw or print two ways you might bless others by helping them to live peacefully.

Is there one way you could try this week?

**We are
peacemakers
when we...**

