

# The Beatitudes: Blueprint for Holiness

## Biblical Reflection for Solemnity of All Saints

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, OCT. 28, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- The words of Salesian Archbishop Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes, spoken during last year's Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, still resound in my mind and heart today on the solemnity of All Saints:

"Jesus says: 'Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matthew 11:29). For more than 2,000 years, men and women, old and young, wise and ignorant, in the East as in the West, applied themselves to the school of the Lord Jesus, which caused this sublime commandment to echo in their hearts and minds: 'You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48).

"Their library was largely composed of the life and the words of Jesus: blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the gentle, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who are persecuted. The saints, understanding that the beatitudes are the essence of the Gospel and the portrait of Christ Himself, became their imitators."

A new recipe

The beatitudes in Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12) are a recipe for extreme holiness. As has been pointed out by many others in the past, though the Mount of the Beatitudes is a few dozen feet above sea level, it is the really the highest peak on earth!

On this holy mountain in Galilee, Jesus proclaimed the new law that was expression of Christ's holiness.

They are not an abstract code of behavior. Jesus is the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted, the peacemaker. He is the new "code of holiness" that must be imprinted on hearts, and that must be contemplated through the action of the Holy Spirit. His Passion and Death are the crowning of his holiness.

Holiness is a way of life that involves commitment and activity. It is not a passive endeavor, but rather a continuous choice to deepen one's relationship with God and to then allow this relationship to guide all of one's actions in the world. Holiness requires a radical change in mindset and attitude. The acceptance of the call to holiness places God as our final goal in every aspect of our lives.

Looking at Jesus, we see what it means to be poor in spirit, gentle and merciful, to mourn, to care for what is right, to be pure in heart, to make peace, to be persecuted. This is why he has the right to say to each of us, "Come, follow me!"

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Jesus does not say simply, "Do what I say." He says, "Come, follow me!"

### Taking stock

The saints and blessed are travel companions along our journey, in joy and suffering. They are men and women who wrote a new page in their lives and in the lives of so many people. This was the core of Pope John Paul III's message to humanity: Holiness is not a gift reserved for a few.

We can all aspire to it, because it is a goal within our capacity -- a great lesson reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council and its call to universal holiness ("Lumen Gentium").

Today's solemnity of All Saints is a wonderful opportunity for the whole Church to take stock once again of the way that the Servant of God, John Paul II, changed our way of viewing the saints and blessed. In nearly 27 years of his pontificate, John Paul II gave the Church 1,338 blessed and 482 saints.

The Polish Pontiff reminded us that the heroes and heroines the world offers to young people today are terribly flawed. They leave us so empty. The real "stars" of his pontificate are the saints and blessed who did not try to be regarded as heroes, or to shock or provoke.

To believe greatness is attainable, we need successful role models to emulate. There is a desperate need for real heroes and heroines, models and witnesses of faith and virtue that the world of sports, cinema, science and music cannot provide.

### Standing at the radical center

Many think that sainthood is a privilege reserved only for the chosen few. Actually, to become a saint is the task of every Christian, and what's more, we could even say it's the task of everyone! How many times have we thought that the saints are merely "eccentrics" that the Church exalts for our imitation; people who were so unrepresentative of and out of touch with the human scene?

It is certainly true of all those men and women who were "eccentric" in its literal sense: they deviated from the center, from usual practice, the ordinary ways of doing things, the established methods. Another way of looking at the saints is that they stood at the "radical centre."

### Saints of the new millennium

John Paul II spoke much to young people about the call to holiness and the vocation to be saints. In his message for World Youth Day 2000 in Rome, he wrote to his "dear young friends" throughout the world unforgettable words that became the rallying cry for the Jubilee's greatest celebration:

"Young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Be contemplative, love prayer; be coherent with your faith and generous in the service of your brothers and sisters, be active members of the Church and builders of peace.

"To succeed in this demanding project of life, continue to listen to his word, draw strength from the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and penance. The Lord wants you to be intrepid apostles of his Gospel and builders of a new humanity."

Two years later for our World Youth Day 2002 in Canada, John Paul II took up once again the theme of holiness and saints in his message to us:

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"Just as salt gives flavor to food and light illumines the darkness, so too holiness gives full meaning to life and makes it reflect God's glory.

"How many saints, especially young saints, can we count in the Church's history! In their love for God their heroic virtues shone before the world, and so they became models of life which the Church has held up for imitation by all. [...]

"Through the intercession of this great host of witnesses, may God make you too, dear young people, the saints of the third millennium!"

At the concluding World Youth Day Mass at Downsview Park in Toronto on July 28, 2002, John Paul II issued a stirring challenge:

"And if, in the depths of your hearts, you feel the same call to the priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid to follow Christ on the royal road of the Cross!

"At difficult moments in the Church's life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. And holiness is not a question of age; it is a matter of living in the Holy Spirit, just as Kateri Tekakwitha did here in America and so many other young people have done."

True reformers

Benedict XVI continued the momentum of John Paul II's invitations and exhortations to holiness at World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne, Germany. At the opening ceremony on Aug. 18, 2005, Benedict XVI addressed the throng of young people from the entire world:

"Dear young people, the Church needs genuine witnesses for the new evangelization: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others. The Church needs saints.

"All are called to holiness, and holy people alone can renew humanity. Many have gone before us along this path of Gospel heroism, and I urge you to turn often to them to pray for their intercession."

Benedict XVI continued this theme at the great vigil on Saturday evening Aug. 20, 2005 at Marienfeld:

"It is the great multitude of the saints -- both known and unknown -- in whose lives the Lord has opened up the Gospel before us and turned over the pages; he has done this throughout history and he still does so today.

"In their lives, as if in a great picture book, the riches of the Gospel are revealed. They are the shining path which God himself has traced throughout history and is still tracing today."

Then Benedict XVI cried out in that great assembly of over one million young people gathered in prayer at Marienfeld in Cologne: "The saints [...] are the true reformers. Now I want to express this in an even more radical way: Only from the saints, only from God does true revolution come, the definitive way to change the world."

At the core

Every crisis that the Church faces, every crisis that the world faces, is a crisis of holiness and a crisis of saints. Holiness is crucial because it is the real face of the Church.

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The core of the proclamation of the saints and blessed was always hope, even in the midst of the darkest moments of history. It's almost as if in those times of darkness the light of Christ shines ever more brightly. We are living through one of those times, and the Lord is still taking applications for his extreme form of holiness and sanctity.

Believers in Jesus and his message must allow themselves to be enticed and enchanted by his life and message contained in the beatitudes.

Today we must hold up the beatitudes as a mirror in which we examine our own lives and consciences. "Am I poor in spirit? Am I humble and merciful? Am I pure of heart? Do I bring peace? Am I 'blessed,' in other words, happy?"

Jesus not only gives us what he has, but also what he is. He is holy and makes us holy.

[The readings for the Solemnity of All Saints are Revelations 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; and Matthew 5:1-12a]

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