

## All Saints Day

There is no word in the New Testament for “happy.” Have you ever noticed that? There are lots of words that come close to meaning something like it, but nothing you can actually translate as meaning exactly what we do when we say someone is “happy”.

Today’s gospel reading contains a really important word that comes close to it. In the portion of Matthew’s gospel we’ve just heard, Jesus tells us how we can be “blessed.” The word in the original Greek text is “Makarios.” Forty odd years ago a new translation of the Bible came out called the Jerusalem Bible. One of the things the translators set themselves was to make the Bible more easily understandable – to use simpler language. They translated that word “makarios” as “Happy,” – “How happy are the poor in Spirit.” Yet lots of people pointed out this passage is about something a bit deeper - a bit more complex - than just being happy. Jesus speaks about those who mourn, those who are hungry, those who are persecuted. These are all people it would be difficult to say are “happy.”

So what’s the difference between being “blessed” and being “happy?” Being happy is a description of our emotions. It’s about how we are feeling, and experiencing the world. Happiness can be with us one moment, and gone the next. Being blessed is slightly different. Being blessed is about being close to God. If that’s true, then it might involve things that make us sad, but which nonetheless draw us closer to him – and give us a sense of deep contentment and joy that goes beyond mere emotions and feelings. For as important as being happy is, and I

wouldn't want for a moment to say it's not, being happy is something that only appertains to this life. Being blessed, however, is something that lasts through this life, and into eternity. Blessedness is that living close to God that we claim is our fundamental aim in this life and in the next.

The reason this reading is set for today's feast of All the Saints is that being a saint is about being blessed. It's about living in such a way that you're close to God. That's the thing that links the lives of all the saints. In different places and times, and in different ways, they lived close to God – by being great teachers, or by helping the poor, by witnessing to Christ in their death, or by consecrating their lives to prayer, by taking the gospel to places it was not known, or by arguing for the truth, by leading the church, or by renewing it with zeal. Whatever it was God called each saint to do, it was the way he had chosen for them to live close to him. And in living close to God they found true blessedness, true fulfilment, true joy, true peace, even though the way may have been difficult and may have involved sacrificing earthly happiness.

So how can we find true blessedness? The important thing to remember is that we receive all the graces we need to be a saint in baptism. It is in baptism that we receive the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love. Baptism puts us into right relationship with God, and takes our sins away. All the way through life, it is our task and challenge as Christians to live in such a way that those graces can come to fruit within us. Through repentance, sacrifice, and loving our neighbour, we learn to be blessed as God lives more and more in us. There will be moments when that feels like something we might describe as happiness. But more and more, it will go beyond a mere feeling, to a deep

sense of fulfilment, and joy, the sense we are in the right place for the right reason, serving the right master. There will be times of great darkness and pain and sorrow, but somehow that won't make that sense of being blessed evaporate in quite the same way that happiness does. And as our life comes to its end, if we have learned to seek blessedness, we will discover it more and more starts to point beyond this life and this existence to a place where being blessed is even more easy, and even more natural – the place where true peace is to be found in God's presence in heaven.