

**Matthew 5:1-12**

What does it take to become a saint? According to Rome, after a person dies there is a five-year waiting period before the process can even begin. However, the pope can waive that requirement as he did following the death of Mother Teresa. In the Roman Church acquiring sainthood is very difficult, but here in America it is really quite easy. All you have to do is to die. If you're attached to a local church, and even if you're not, the eulogies that are spoken about you raise you to the status of a saint in everyone's eyes. Now perhaps if you were a rapist or a serial killer not much good would be said about you, but otherwise you've pretty much got it made. Sainthood is a sure thing once the eulogies begin.

It's one thing, however, to be a saint in the eyes of the world, or even the church, but quite another thing to be called a saint by God. Young children can play "doctor," but just because all the other children refer to one of them as the doctor, does not make him a doctor. And just because two dozen glowing eulogies are given when you die, this does not elevate you to the status of a saint in God's eyes. More important than what we say about each other, and what we think about ourselves, is what God says about us.

In Matthew 5 Jesus preaches His Sermon on the Mount and He begins by giving His Eight Eulogies. Perhaps you know them better as the Eight Beatitudes or Blessings. But since "blessing" and "eulogy" mean the same thing, they are essentially the Eight Eulogies. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He begins "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Eight times He speaks in this way, and just for good measure He comes back with one more—a ninth eulogy—"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." Nine eulogies...and we haven't even died yet.

People sometimes complain that all the praises heaped upon one who has died, in the way of eulogies, should have been spoken to the person before he died. But I think it's better the way it's done, because how could he ever measure up? It would be impossible to live up to all the good things said about us after we're dead. And even if we tried to do so, the stress would probably kill us. But Jesus speaks His eulogies to us while we are still able to hear them. He does not, however, desire to give us a "big head," to inflate our ego, and turn us into "Pharisees." Rather, He speaks in this way to comfort us and give us hope.

Today's eulogies focus on the life and actions of a person when he was alive—what he did for his family; how he treated his friends and neighbors; what he accomplished; all the good things he said and did. But to be fair and honest, everything evil and wicked should also be brought up. "John, here, was a hard-working family man, but he also lied to his wife quite often, had selfish motives, and he worried too much." But those things are not said, are they? We'll tell our neighbor what a jerk he is when he's alive, but when he's dead we tell his family what a saint he was.

And yet we know it's not true—all the praises heaped upon those who have died. "All our good deeds are but filthy rags," God says through His prophet, Isaiah—and we know He's right. We have to live with ourselves day after day. We know how awful our secret desires are. We know the wicked words we mutter under our breath. We are well aware of the selfish things we do when no one is looking. We know that we're not saints, and so save

the eulogies for after we're dead and buried because the evil that we've done far outweighs anything for which we should be praised.

There's a big difference between today's eulogies and Jesus' eulogies in Matthew 5. Rather than bless us for what we've done, He blesses us for who we are. The Beatitudes do not tell us how to live—they tell us who we are in Christ. Jesus is not commanding you to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, to be merciful, to be pure in heart and so forth—rather, you are the “blessed of God” because He is all of these things for you. You're not going to receive praise from God because you hunger and thirst for righteousness, but He blesses you for Jesus' sake because Jesus had this hunger and thirst, for you. God does not call you His child because you strive to be a peacemaker in your life. He declares that you are His child because Jesus made peace for you by His death on the cross. He is the Peacemaker.

Today we observe All Saints' Day. Many of you have loved ones who died trusting in Jesus. You can rejoice that they are in heaven, not because they lived like saints, but because God declared them to be His saints in Jesus Christ—through faith in Him. “For all the saints who from their labors rest,” we sing; “Who, Thee by faith, before the world confessed.” Our loved ones are in heaven because Jesus lived “like a Saint” for them, and this they confessed. Jesus was holy in their place. Jesus suffered persecution for them. He suffered, and He died, and He rose again, and they're in heaven precisely because they believed and confessed that Jesus did these things for them.

And that is also why you are a saint—not because you're saintly...we're not; not because of what your hands have done for others, but because your mouth confesses the Name of Christ—because you trust, not in what you do for Jesus, but in what He does for you.

It doesn't matter what others may call you. If you were dead only nice things would be said about you. But because you are alive you'll be called some names from time to time. But Jesus says, “Rejoice!” If others ridicule you for your faith; if they resent you and insult you for being a Christian, Jesus says you are “Blessed”—not because of what you do, but because of who you are—God's blessed saint. And even if the whole world says otherwise, you who trust in Jesus Christ are God's saints. Even if your own heart reminds you what a terrible sinner you are God says that you are His saint in Jesus Christ.

And there is no five-year waiting period. You were washed in the blood of the Lamb in Holy Baptism. God declared you His saint right then and there. And you receive that blood in the cup of salvation to assure you, again and again, that you are God's saint. This is who you are—one of His “blessed ones” in Jesus Christ.

You know, even Mother Teresa was a wicked sinner, and it doesn't matter how much love she showed to others...the only way for her to be a saint in God's eyes and to enter into heaven, is the same way for all of us—through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Not faith in what we do; not trusting that God is pleased with us for our good behavior—faith in Christ alone is what makes a saint.

And so who needs today's eulogies? You already have Christ in Word and Sacrament. Your sins are forgiven. You are cleansed of all wrongdoing. You're a saint, holy and blameless in the eyes of God. Let the world have their eulogies. We have Christ. We are named God's saints in Him. When you die it doesn't matter what is said about you. What

matters is who you are—a sinner forgiven by Jesus Christ in whom you trust; a saint...  
God's precious saint...one of His "blessed ones." Amen.