

On Halloween a couple years ago, some trick-or-treaters rang the doorbell at my rectory. I went to the door to give them their candy, dressed as I usually am, as a priest. One of the kids looked me up and down and said, “Are you supposed to be a priest or something?” (I guess the big church right next door wasn’t a big enough hint.) I was thrown off for a second, but then I answered, “Yes, I **am** supposed to be a priest.”

It got me thinking about All Saints Day, which we celebrate today, because on this day we ask, “What is a saint anyway?” It means being who we are supposed to be, being who God created us to be. Unlike Halloween, which is about dressing up and pretending to be someone else, being a saint is about being our truest, most genuine selves.

On All Saints Day, we celebrate all the saints, both those formally canonized by the Church, and the many people whose names we don’t know, but who have also lived lives of heroic holiness, in quieter ways, and are now with God in Heaven, praying for us. It’s important for us to celebrate this day because it reminds us that we too can (and should) become saints. God created each one of us to live a truly holy life. It is by His grace, not human effort alone, that all the saints we commemorate today (and hopefully us, too, someday) have become extraordinary examples of sanctity.

So how do we do it? What is the blueprint? Looking at today’s Gospel reading, the Beatitudes, can help us a great deal to see and follow the path of holiness that God has drawn for us. Obviously, we could talk all day about the Beatitudes, but we’ll just consider them briefly, to see how we can become saints.

First, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” It’s not talking about material poverty, but rather poverty of spirit. It means that we are not full of ourselves or full of pride. Rather, we are lowly. As a matter of fact, if we think to ourselves, “I’m so holy, I’m already a saint,” then we’re headed in the wrong direction. Instead, if we’re able to acknowledge, “Yes, I am a sinner, but I trust in God to help me repent and become holier,” then we are on the path to sainthood.

Next, “Blessed are those who mourn.” Sadly, all of us experience mourning in life, the pain of losing loved ones. The world often mourns without hope, but in faith, we know that God will comfort us, and reunite us one day in Heaven with our lost loved ones.

Next, “Blessed are the meek.” We called, not to try to take over the world or dominate everyone else, but to be gentle. This doesn’t mean being a doormat though. Yes, we do “turn the other cheek,” but this requires a great amount of courage to do properly.

Next, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” If we are bothered by the evil and injustice that we see in the world around us, and we work and pray to correct it, that is a good sign. If, however, we’ve grown cold and callous to the suffering of others, saying, “It’s not my problem; bad things happen every day,” then we’re headed in the wrong direction. But if those things do bother us, and we seek God’s help to correct them, then we are on the path to holiness.

Next, “Blessed are the merciful.” Are we willing to forgive those who sin against us, even those who don’t seem to deserve our forgiveness? Oftentimes, we want the other person to apologize to us first, or do something big to earn our forgiveness, but this is a mistake. If we are to become saints, then we must be willing to forgive the unworthy.

Next, “Blessed are the pure of heart.” We are called to see in other people the image of God, and not see only what we can get out of them. Rather, we are to truly love people as individuals, and see God in them.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” If we enjoy the drama of seeing other people fight, then we are on the wrong path. But if instead we work to restore peace between others, then we are on the path to holiness.

And finally, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness or the Gospel.” We’re tempted to think the opposite: Blessed am I when I’m not persecuted. But the life of holiness is not about popularity. We know that the prophets and the saints of old were willing to endure persecution, so that they might proclaim the Gospel.

The danger of celebrating the saints is to see the heroic and extraordinary things they did, like miracles, and to think, “Well, I could never do that; I could never be a saint.” But that’s a mistake. Being a saint is not about doing big, impressive things, but about simply being faithful to God, and living out the Beatitudes. So with God’s help, let’s strive to do that today and every day.