

Lectio Divina – Feast of All Saints - Year B

Contexts

Matthew's Gospel

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Written by a well-educated Jewish scholar (the term “according to Matthew” was added only in 2nd century). The author is not named in the text. A tradition beginning around 100 CE holds that the author is Matthew the disciple.
- Written for a predominantly Greek speaking Jewish audience, perhaps in Syria.
- Draws on Gospel of Mark (contains almost the whole of Mark's Gospel) and Q source and also has much unique material.
- Well ordered & structured account beginning with genealogy (Abraham).
- Has basic structure of narrative followed by discourse (often called sermons)
- Principal divisions:
 1. Infancy Narrative (1:1-2:23)
 2. Proclamation of the Kingdom (3:1-7:29)
 3. Mission & Ministry in Galilee (8:1-11:1)
 4. Opposition from Israel (11:2-13:53)
 5. Jesus, the Kingdom & the church (13:54-18:35)
 6. Ministry in Judea & Jerusalem (19:1-25:46)
 7. Passion & Resurrection (26:1-28:20)
- Shows how Old Testament texts and predictions are fulfilled in life & ministry of Jesus.
- Heavy concentration on divine origin and nature of Jesus.
- Son of David – healing, miracle-working Messiah of Israel.
- Jesus comes to fulfil the ancient promise and teach the truth about God – hence many controversies with the Scribes & Pharisees (may also reflect Matthew's community's struggles with their local Jewish neighbours).
- Concern that Jewish tradition not be lost.

Matthew 5:1-12 – things to notice

- Popularly known as The Beatitudes (Beatitude = blessing) which is part of the longer Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 4:23-7:29)
- Note: Luke has 4 beatitudes; Matthew 8. Only the first 3 of Luke's are thought to be authentic sayings of Jesus (about the poor, mourners and the hungry). The fourth comes from the early church.
- Matthew's additions are his own expansion from the psalms.
- A beatitude is an exclamation of congratulations that recognises an existing state of happiness.
- Blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs – note the use of present tense. Other beatitudes have future tense ('shall').
- The poor are blessed not because they are poor but because they have claim on God's special care for them. God is seen as an Oriental king. The king's duty was to protect the weak. The poor are the needy ones of Israel. Their poverty is real and economic but has a spiritual dimension.
- *The Gentle*: it means those who are gentle with others, echoing the compassion, mercy and slowness to anger of God often referred to in the Old Testament.
- *Those who mourn* to see evil reign on the earth. Not really those mourning the death of someone they love.
- *Those who hunger and thirst for what is right*: just what is says. Those who are driven by the need to do right – not the right or justice of a law court, but the righteousness which comes from being transformed into the image of Christ & living according to the Kingdom.
- *The merciful*: Those who forgive, who love, who have compassion.
- *Pure in heart*: not the ritual purity of the Pharisees & others (external), but the internal purity which comes from 'singlemindedness' in the service of God, acting with pure intentions towards others (ie without self-interest or exploitation), to act justly.
- *Peacemakers*: Those who make peace, bring about peace, live at peace with their neighbour as part of the duty of loving neighbour.

- *Happy those persecuted because of me*: reference to the experience of persecution and martyrdom in the early Church.
- Note that all rewards are only finally realised in the Kingdom of God.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The Feast of All Saints has its origins in a 4th century feast of “All Martyrs”. In the 7th century, by which time the era of martyrdom had largely passed, it became “All Saints”.

Matthew has transformed a short messianic manifesto into a program for life – a list of virtues which belong to those called into the Kingdom. This is how people of the Kingdom live; these are the qualities which mark their lives.

The text is chosen for the Feast of All Saints for just that reason. We recognise in it the kind of life to which we are called. We recognise saints as those people who lived by these qualities – whether or not they are formally canonised.

The Feast of All Saints celebrates all those ‘saints’ who have entered fully into the Kingdom.

Its partner feast is the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls) the next day. Note: these people are the FAITHFUL departed (not the Unfaithful departed!) This commemoration tries to answer the questions, “What about those who were not perfect in their following of Christ”, who may have tried but not always succeeded like the saints and about whose fate we might be less certain.

This Gospel is often used at funerals. Many people think this is because of the reference to ‘those who mourn’. But that is not why the Church lists it as appropriate for funerals. Funerals are about celebrating the life of those who lived according to the Gospel. That is what this Gospel is all about.

Reflection

Today’s first reading from Apocalypse gives us a vision of the saints gathered in eternal life.

The second reading from the letter of St John invites us to think about God’s love for us, a love which embraces us as God’s own children.

The Gospel is the Beatitudes from St Matthew’s Gospel. This traditional description of Christian living blesses those who live according to the great Christian virtues of humility, justice, righteousness, forgiveness, mercy and peace. This is the way into God’s eternal life and into eternal life with God.