

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

All Saints  
November 6, 2005  
Fr Bill McGinty

**“A Code For A Jedi Knight”**

For the last three to four months we have been reading the Gospel of Matthew. Today's reading from Matthew's Gospel is probably one of the most famous ever. It begins Chapter 5 of the Gospel and is the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. Everything that follows, stems from these nine sentences, that we call the Beatitudes. Taken as the nine ideals of Jesus' teaching, they are a road map for all Christians to live by.

Today's feast of All Saints, celebrates the lives of all those men and women who lived by these ideals. They are not the great saints whose names are to be found on Churches or have Colleges, schools and even cities named after them. These were the little people, the ordinary every day Mary and Joe, who struggle to bring up a family and who shared their Christian values with their neighbor and their community. Today's feast is about them and in a sense it is about us, because these are the same Beatitudes and the same values that we are called to each and every day.

Rapidly, we are coming up to the end of the church's calendar year. It ends on November 20, the feast of Christ the King. The 27<sup>th</sup> of November is the First week of the New Year and the beginning of the season of Advent. Just like the business world we are tempted to look back and evaluate what we have achieved and how we have failed in the year that has gone.. We are tempted, but I find that a futile exercise. Instead it is much better to look forward to the year ahead and plan how we in this place can face the challenge of these nine Beatitudes that Jesus has presented to us.

Jesus says: “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God.” You are poor in spirit each time you respond to a disaster, an earthquake, a famine. You are poor in Spirit when Africa's hurt becomes your hurt; you are poor in Spirit when Shop Rite's on sale item goes in your cart for the Food Pantry. Being a saint and responding to Jesus can be real practical.

And Jesus said “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. In a sense that is what we are trying to do, build Christ's Kingdom here on earth. But maybe, just maybe, responding to the poor in our midst gives them also a taste of Christ's Kingdom.

Jesus asks us to mourn in the knowledge that we will all experience Resurrection. It is not a teaching Christians care to think too much about. We don't like contemplating death or that far into the future. Yet Jesus is the great comforter, his message is one of optimism he promises us a future if we share his teaching now.

You could go through these Beatitudes each one a hundred times and take one hundred teachings from them.

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

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Blessed are the meek blessed the righteous; blessed the peacemaker.

But really there is but one teaching here. Have you ever seen a page with a watermark? You can do it on the computer in Publisher or Print shop. No matter what you are writing you can click on a window and put a watermark message under whatever you write. I did it once or twice in the Cobblestone. It just said “Cobblestone” over and over.

Well, the watermark that underpins the Beatitudes is “Jesus is Lord” For adopting these ideals is to welcome Jesus into your life. To do that you must have a real serious commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. It is not something Anglicans or Episcopalians care to advertise too openly. It’s rare to see us at Convention with tee shirts or sweat shirts that read: “I’m a Jesus person”, although you will see shirts that say: “Our priests wear skirts”

“I’m a Jesus person,” is just too Evangelical. We associate it with Peter, Paul and Mary, tambourines and hippies in California.

Yet, when you get right down to it, that is what this Gospel is asking and we can say it in a sedate Anglican way: “What does Jesus mean to you in your life?” How important is he to you really? It’s a difficult question to answer, isn’t it?

We would all like to feel that Jesus has a great importance in our life. We want to tell ourselves that we are committed to him and his Gospel.

Nowhere in the Gospel does Jesus ask us to worship him. He does not seek recognition or admiration. What he seeks are people to follow him. “Follow me” is Jesus’ first teaching to his disciples. “Follow me and I will show you the Kingdom of Heaven”

Here in this Gospel is the Kingdom that Jesus has in mind. It is the direct opposite of the values of the world. You can live your life in the Spirit of Jesus’ Gospel without rushing off to Africa or paddling a canoe up the Amazon.

. We can find the Beatitudes and Christ’s Kingdom right here in our midst, in our community who we share this space with.

You only need to replace the word “Blessed” in the Beatitudes with the word “saints” and you immediately know what Jesus is saying. “The saints are the poor in spirit; it is the saints who mourn, the saints who are meek...” Do any of these. Incorporate any of these teachings into your life and your will indeed become a saint. Today’s feast celebrate that Jesus is the watermark in our life because we choose to stamp our way of living with his teaching.

Celebrate that in your liturgy; celebrate that in today’s Gospel. Today’s Gospel invites us to look around us in these old pews and say: “these are my saints, these are my fellow disciples, these are the people I care to share the ups and downs of my life with, here are my Beatitudes, and Christ, Risen, the Redeemer dwells in our midst.”

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One of my great heroes is Douglas Hyde. He hated Communism with a passion. When he eventually became a Christian in 1947 he was not content to stay in church and do the things ordinary men do. Douglas Hyde was a fanatic. He lived his life at a fast pace with one goal in mind, that he was going to eradicate Communism from individuals lives and he was going to use Christ and Christianity to do it.

Douglas Hyde was the Jedi Knight of his generation, he wrote lectured and worked tirelessly to convince people that Jesus Christ had the answers to all men's needs.

In London there is a place called Hyde Park Corner where Oxford Street meets the Bayswater Road, and Hyde Park begins. It's important to the British because it is the place that epitomizes "free speech" There on a Sunday anyone can stand up on a soapbox or ladder and talk, lecture, or preach. Many people go and crowds gather to listen to the hecklers, who can be rude, clever and funny all at the same time.

Douglas Hyde spoke there Sunday after Sunday to crowd after crowd. Even among the hecklers he received a grudging respect, because Douglas could fight back and he was unashamed to fight for Jesus.

Can you imagine yourself standing on a ladder in Times Square Sunday after Sunday, telling people about Jesus and the Gospel? To do that you have to believe. To do that you had better know about Jesus Christ. To do that you had better have the courageous of a Jedi Knight and a few of his skills.

Have you ever had the opportunity to defend or explain your faith to someone else? We have been doing some of this in J2A sessions on Sunday afternoons. J2A means "Journey to Adulthood, but they are really Jedi Knights in training.

Douglas Hyde was so convinced of his faith and the person of Jesus that every now and then he engaged in a dangerous game. He allowed himself to be locked up in a foreign prison with a Communist terrorist leader. Week after week, month after month he would argue, debate, convince and teach them about Jesus and the Gospel story in a tiny cell with no windows. You had better be fanatical to do that. You had better truly believe to risk your life in that way. Douglas did.

Walk around London today, you will find no statues of Douglas Hyde, or churches named after him. He is just a name on a page of history. When in 1983 President Ronald Reagan called Communism: "the Evil Empire," he could have been taken the words straight out of Douglas Hyde's book: "I Believed."

Douglas is one of the saints we celebrate today. He took these Beatitudes and made them a code for his life. Today's Gospel asks us to make them a code for our life too. Least we forget: Jesus is Lord is stamped upon our baptized soul.

Amen+

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