

On the Right Road

On this All Saints Day when we are reminded of the saints who have gone before, we encounter texts that blur the line between past, present, and future by encouraging us to travel the long trodden road toward God's love, justice, and liberation.

Focus scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

Those who follow Jesus up the mountain, both disciples and the crowd, can hardly be faulted for being reminded of Moses who helped shape a motley crew of wandering ex-slaves into a community of liberation. Biblical scholars point out the many ways the gospel of Matthew helps make the connection between Jesus and Moses. It is on this mountain that Jesus offers an inaugural sermon akin to Jesus' inaugural message at Nazareth, which is recorded in the gospel of Luke. In both Nazareth and on the mountain, Jesus sets forth the identity, purpose, and direction of his ministry.

The crowd, hanging further back, are keenly aware of the poverty and injustices they face at the hands of imperial Rome. Can this Jesus make any difference in their lives and world? The disciples have already thrown their lot in with Jesus, but their understanding of what Jesus is calling them to be and do is still in the formative stage. As a prophet and leader of the divinely inspired liberation movement to which Moses earlier gave leadership, Jesus knows what is at stake.

By his very life, Jesus represents for the people the character of God who calls them into a liberated and justice-oriented way of living that is in direct opposition to the controlling, oppressive way of living established by Rome. Jesus invites and encourages them to be citizens of this new way of being, which he calls the kingdom of God.

The blessings that follow only make sense for a people who recognize the threat of domination systems because they live it. Each blessing is designed to support, encourage, and nurture a way of life that is counter to the exploitation and oppression they are familiar with. In his commentary in *Feasting on the Word*, Patrick Gray tells us that the word blessing translated from the Hebrew *ashar* is best translated "you are on the right road." In other words, Jesus says, "You are on the right road when you are in poor in spirit...when you mourn...when you are meek...when you

hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Being on the right road and blessing are synonymous. There is no contradiction between mourning and blessing if you are on the road toward God's realm of liberation and justice. Each of the blessings takes on new and vital meaning because they are no longer about an unrealizable aspiration. On the contrary, they are about the energy, spirit, and power given to everyone in the present who is on this road. For those who are on the right road, there also exists a new experience of time, one in which those who have died or gone before share in the present, offering support and encouragement. Something we might expect from all the saints.

Revelation 7:9–1 confronts imperial Rome and systems of domination with vivid and dramatic eschatological language, picturing a future in which the blessings have come into fullness. Differences of language, culture, or any other means of human separation create no barriers for inclusion in this place of justice, compassion, and healing. Revelation calls upon the churches to become witnesses to this ultimate promise.

The writer of **Psalm 34:1–10, 22** refuses to let troubles of any sort keep one from living in the blessing and presence of God. In all situations, one can magnify the glory of God because it is never about momentary loss, but rather living in relationship with this God of liberation, justice, and mercy.

1 John 3:1–3 returns to the theme of identity and purpose. Core to that identity is the basic premise of knowing you are loved. It is this love that purifies us for living as citizens of God's realm.

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In this week's readings, there is no disconnect between hard times and God's love. Just the opposite, love can lead us into the struggle of a new way of living, a new world. The blessing comes in knowing this road, this path, however challenging, is one that leads to life?



Focus scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

Additional scriptures

Revelation 7:9–1

Psalm 34:1–10

1 John 3:1–3



Seasons of the Spirit

is based on semi-

continuous readings of the

Revised Common Lectionary.

Blessed One, you never cease to surprise us. We grow accustomed to a way of accounting for our lives that often puts us in the losing column. Help us claim the identity and direction you offer to us so that we may stay on the road to your freedom, justice, mercy, and compassion. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 12–14

Celebrity worship is a common occurrence in the lives of young teenagers. They cover the walls of their rooms with posters of their favourite movie stars, bands, or athletes. These idols can influence a young teen's clothing and hair style, speech, even values. Adolescents are in a critical period of observing life and making judgments about those who might be role models for them. Some of these secular idols do provide positive role models for youth to follow as their own identities are emerging.

On this All Saints Day, youth will be encouraged to think about people who have been their mentors and role models, especially those who have encouraged them as they grow in faith and their relationship with God, each other, and the world. They will also

be encouraged to reflect on the ways in which they too are or can be "saints" in whom God's love and God's way can be seen.

With their natural compassion and care for others, younger youth may be able to identify with Jesus' teaching that God's blessings come to those who are ignored by society and those who are viewed as outcasts. Some of the youth in your group may have had very real experiences of being "persecuted" by bullies or experiencing those who "utter all kinds of evil against them." You will have to be aware of this as today's reading is explored. Pray that as youth reflect on the messages in Jesus' teaching about God's realm, they will be open to new understandings, and will discover new possibilities for working for peace and justice.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Matthew 5:1–12, Psalm 34:1–10, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 51).
- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark in focus passage.
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit www.seasonsonline.ca and click on Lection Connection. Bring information that might inform this week's session.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 9), and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheet "[Speaking of Blessings](#)."

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "Hold Us in Your Grace" (p. 16 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Engage

- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheet "[Speaking of Blessings](#)."

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Reflection:** copies of the section "Personal reflection" on this week's resource sheet "[Saints](#)"
- ❑ **Game:** copies of the section "All Saints game" on this week's resource sheet "[Saints](#)"; cut strips with saint names apart, making sure there are at least two of each one.
- ❑ **Poster:** poster board

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the refrain for the song "Be God's" (pp. 10–11 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #3 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



On the Right Road

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To discover that we are saints as we work for peace and justice

Gather

Welcome young people and share experiences from the past week.

Gather in the worship area and light the candle.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song “Hold Us in Your Grace” (p. 16 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Speaking of Blessings](#),” form two groups, and invite groups to read alternate lines of the “Opening prayer,” based on **Psalm 34:1–4, 8**.

Making connections

Invite youth to think of someone they admire. This could be someone famous, such as a movie star, athlete, or world leader, or it might be a favourite relative, sibling, or friend. Distribute sheets of newsprint and invite youth to draw a person-shaped outline on their papers, adding facial features, hair, clothing, and a distinctive item that symbolizes the person they admire. Then have them introduce their heroes to each other and say a bit about what characteristics they admire most, and how these people have inspired them

Engage

Setting the scene

Today’s reading from the gospel of Matthew is the beginning of the first of Jesus’ five main teachings recorded in this gospel. Jesus teaches about practical things such as prayer, money, and dealing with worries, and offers a picture of what life looks like in God’s realm. In the previous chapter, the gospel writer describes Jesus’ travels through Galilee, where he taught in the synagogues and cured many people. Read **Matthew 4:25** and **Matthew 5:1–2**. The teaching that we will read today is part of what is called the “Sermon on the Mount.”

Moving into the story

Invite youth to engage in a choral reading of **Matthew 5:3–12**. Have the whole group say together “Blessed are...” at the beginning of each verse, with youth taking turns reading the rest of each verse. Have them read verse 12 in unison. Draw a chart on a sheet of newsprint, with one column labelled “Who” and the other labelled “What.” Invite youth to look at each verse, identifying who Jesus is referring to (for example, “the poor in spirit”) and the blessing each group receives.

■ Who does Jesus name as those who will receive God’s blessings?

Invite a volunteer to read another translation of today’s reading, found on the resource sheet “[Speaking of Blessings](#),” substituting the word “God” for “he,” “him,” and “his” in the listing of blessings.

■ Who does this version name as those who will receive God’s blessings?

■ What is promised to each group?

■ How would each blessing be God’s gift to each group?

This teaching could be described as Jesus’ vision of what life is like in God’s kingdom, or God’s realm. Those groups that Jesus identifies may not be those whom we would identify as saints, or heroes.

■ What do you think Jesus is saying about God in this teaching?

■ What do you think Jesus is saying about how we are to live in God’s realm?

Invite youth to look again at verse 12, and think of times when they might have experienced being persecuted.

- **What do you think it means to be persecuted “because of Jesus” or for Jesus’ sake?**
- **How can these last verses of Jesus’ teaching encourage us to live in God’s way?**

Connecting scripture with life

The reading we have today is sometimes called the “Beatitudes,” which means “a statement about those who are blessed.” Invite youth to think about those

who have encouraged, supported, and celebrated with them as they have tried to live in God’s way.

- **How has this teaching of Jesus helped you to understand better some of the things we are called to do as we live in God’s way?**

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, a time to remember all those people, long ago and today, who live fully in God’s way and work patiently and hopefully to make a difference in the world.

- **In what ways are we also saints, sharing God’s love with others, and working for peace and justice in the world?**

Respond

Choose from the following activities:

- **Reflection** Jesus teaches that showing mercy, relying on God, and working for peace is what we do as God’s people. Distribute copies of the section “Personal reflection” on the resource sheet “Saints” and review the definitions. Invite youth to write their own definition of a saint and those they consider saints. Share these thoughts together.
- **Game** Invite youth to play a game and learn more about some of the saints in the past whose lives have demonstrated living in God’s way. Distribute the slips of paper with saints’ names (youth can have more than one slip); review the game described on the resource sheet “Saints” and play together for a while. Then invite youth to tell each other about “their” saints, reading



the information on the slips, and adding anything they might also know about these people. Have youth name others that they would consider to be saints today, or in the past, and explain why they have named these people.

- **Poster** On All Saints Day we celebrate the life and work of God’s saints in the world. Invite youth to create a poster of saints by drawing a person-shaped outline on a sheet of poster board and writing, inside the shape, words and phrases that characterize a saint, such as humble, merciful, pure hearts, make peace. Around the outline of the person-shape have youth print the names of saints, both from long ago, and today (such as world leaders, church workers, mentors, including their own names).

Bless

Gather around the lit candle, inviting young people to spend a few moments in silence looking at the flame.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the refrain for the song, “Be God’s” (pp. 10–11 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #3 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Blessing Offer the following blessing: “(Name), may God bless you, and may you be a blessing to others.”

Reflect

What insights did youth express about what it means to be a saint, one who shows us what it means to live in God’s way? How did they see themselves as saints as they follow Jesus’ teachings?



Speaking of Blessings

Opening prayer

I will always praise the Lord.

With all my heart, I will praise the Lord.

Let all who are helpless, listen and be glad.

Honour the Lord with me! Celebrate his great name.

I asked the Lord for help,

And he saved me from all my fears.

Discover for yourself that the Lord is kind...

Come to him for protection, and you will be glad.

Psalm 34:1-4, 8

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the side of a mountain and sat down. Jesus' disciples gathered around him, and he taught them:

God blesses those people who depend only on him.
They belong to the kingdom of heaven!

God blesses those people who grieve.
They will find comfort!

God blesses those people who are humble.
The earth will belong to them!

God blesses those people who want to obey him more than to eat or drink.
They will be given what they want!

God blesses those people who are merciful.
They will be treated with mercy!

God blesses those people whose hearts are pure.
They will see him!

God blesses those people who make peace.
They will be called his children!

God blesses those people who are treated badly for doing right.
They belong to the kingdom of heaven.

God will bless you when people insult you, mistreat you, and tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me.

Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven. People did the same things to the prophets who lived long ago.

Matthew 5:1-12

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Saints

Personal reflection

Who is a saint?

“A saint is a holy or godly person.”

“A saint is one of the blessed in heaven.”

“A saint is a very patient and unselfish person.”

“A saint is someone who has made a difference in the world.”

My definition...

A saint is _____

I think _____ is a saint because _____

I think _____ is a saint because _____

I think _____ is a saint because _____

ALL SAINTS GAME

1. Distribute names of well-known saints among the group, making sure that each name is used more than once.
2. Arrange chairs (one fewer than the number of players) in a circle.
3. One person acts as caller, standing in the middle of the group while the others sit on the chairs. The caller calls out a saint's name (for example, "St. Patrick!") and all players who have been given that name have to switch places. The caller also tries to claim an empty seat.
4. The one left without a seat becomes the next caller. Occasionally a caller can shout "All Saints Day!" and everyone must claim a new seat.
5. Continue playing until all names have been called.

Game taken from *Youth Spirit*, compiled by Cheryl Perry. Published by Wood Lake Books, © 1997. Used with permission.

Saints and heroes

Cut these strips apart and distribute among group members.

Saint Patrick: missionary to Ireland; started churches and schools and cared for all people.

Saint Nicholas: bishop in Turkey; known for helping children and youth.

Saint Catherine of Siena: known as a peacemaker in the church.

Archbishop Oscar Romero: helped the poor people of Central America.

Helen Keller: through perseverance against blindness and deafness she became a symbol of courage and hope.

Mother Theresa: spent her life caring for the dying in India.