



James: Living Out Our Faith November 2

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.
The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16*

All Saints Sunday

Several of my friends, all of whom work in the medical field, recently expressed alarm when the first Ebola patient flew to the United States for treatment. Since then we've learned about two Dallas nurses that have contracted Ebola, as well as a New York doctor working with Ebola patients on the African continent. According to a Harvard School of Public Health survey, 40 percent of Americans feel "at risk" of contracting the disease. As I flew home this week from overseas, armed with antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer, I wondered about the potential of this growing epidemic and the possible hazards involved in our nomadic lifestyle. I, along with many others, have Ebola on the brain.

Enter All Saints Day. All Saints Day reminds us of our communion with those that have gone before, with our spiritual ancestors throughout the centuries from as far away as Africa and as close as our own parish. But All Saints Day is also a day to remind us of our bond with all believers, those here in present day as well as the more than 4500 people that have died from Ebola outside of the United States. We know that here in America our healthcare system is more equipped to offer effective treatment than the healthcare system in West Africa, but how does All Saints' Day speak to the inequality crisis among those who are more vulnerable than we are? What relationship are we to have with the international community impacted by this disease?

Jesus had plenty to say about our reactions to those that would choose to follow Him in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). Jesus' blessings to his disciples involved the "poor in spirit", "those who mourn", "the meek" and people that "hunger and thirst for righteousness." The individuals in Jesus' day suffered tough lives. True justice was scarce, people were without power, lives were short and poverty was normal. As we protect ourselves from the global world, Jesus uses All Saints' Day to remind us that He is at work in Africa where grief, terror and sickness are an everyday occurrence.

In Matthew 5:7-10, Jesus offers blessings on the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. He pronounces blessings on those individuals who live the values he proclaims. In our present day consider the thousands of people working with Ebola patients, serving the families impacted by ISIS or working alongside the persecuted church. God offers blessings to those who show love and courage amid devastating circumstances.

As I prepare in a few short weeks for a trip to the African continent, I am confronted with an ugly fact regarding the Ebola scare. Here in the United States we possess enormous resources for medical research. But Ebola wasn't *our* problem until it crossed our borders. All Saints' Day and the Beatitudes remind us of the blessing that God gives to those who suffer and to those who offer aid in the midst of suffering. On this day, let us allow ourselves to extend our resources and join in active involvement on behalf of those who suffer. Let us reject a selfish protective attitude and become present with the Saints God is using throughout the world.

1. Read Matthew 5:1-11. On first reading, how do you think the Beatitudes might challenge expectations of what it means to be a Christian?
2. It seems that the things we look at as evil (poverty, hunger, mourning, injustice) are a necessary precedent to the good things of life (the Kingdom, comfort, satisfaction). Why is this?
3. Think about a time in your life when you felt deeply blessed, while people around you might have assessed the situation differently. What was the source of your blessing? Why might other people have looked at you and thought of you as being far from blessed?
4. In verse 6 of Matthew 5, we read that we are to hunger and thirst for righteousness (justice). How do we demonstrate that hunger and what are we to do about it?
5. What kind of persecution is blessed (verse 10)? Does political, moral, ethical, social persecution qualify?
6. In the Beatitudes, which of Jesus' blessings mean the most to you and why?
7. What does the word "saint" bring to mind? Talk about a person that is a saint to you. How has God spoken to you through this person and how does this person inspire you to live?
8. Read Ephesians 3:17-18. How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ? Why is the phrase "with all the saints" significant?