

Those remembered: Eileen Kelly, Gloria Johnson, Lyla Nelson, Janet Schultz, Marvin Schultz, David Nelson, "Brian" Nutter, and Marie Dalke

---

*As follows in Jesus' name:*

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ...

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied.<sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

---

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

These are very gracious and blessed words from our Lord.

Here He speaks blessing after blessing upon His Church militant, we who still struggle in this world.

And He promises us wonderful and undeserved rewards.

And really, these blessings couldn't come at a better time.

It is no secret that there are many people today who are suffering... often in silence.

Depression and anxiety are rampant... diagnosed and undiagnosed.

Feelings of loneliness and isolation are prevalent, even when surrounded by lots of people.

Guilt and shame overwhelm people, sometimes they know why, sometimes they don't.

Some people self-medicate with alcohol, others with illicit drug,

others with legal, but dangerous drugs

still others misuse or overuse prescription drugs, trying to cover or ignore their pain.

I am guessing that I don't need to tell you these things, because Christians are not immune from them.

If you don't suffer with such things, you know Christians who do and, like in society, it is not a few.

Perhaps it might be comforting to know that ours isn't the first generation to suffer such things...

that we are not alone in this.

But the real comfort isn't in recognizing shared sufferings with those who have gone before us,

but in sharing the same relief.

The author of the Hebrews writes that we are surrounded by a **great crowd of witnesses**.

These witnesses aren't the kind that report on crimes they saw in the court of law.

These are the kind that testify that what the Lord promised them, He has fulfilled.

These are people like Abel, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and David;

and Zecharais and Elizabeth, the Virgin Mary, the 12 Apostles & St. Paul, and Mary Magdalene;

but why stop there: Ambrose, Augustine, the Venerable Bede, Martin Luther, and Johann Gerhard.

And today, we also recognize 8 others associated with us, who began their eternal rest this past year:

Eileen Kelly, Gloria Johnson, Lyla Nelson, Janet & Marvin Schultz, David Nelson,

"Brian" Nutter, and Marie Dalke.

These are all are witnesses to us of the relief and salvation that the Lord gave to them.

Note that Jesus did not live or believe in an “ivory tower” of idealism.

His beatitudes do not paint a picture of perfection here in this life.

Instead, there is a recognition of the pain and strife that is this life of corruption.

Think of it: **Those “who mourn”** regret and repent over their sin.

**Hungering and thirsting for righteousness** shows the need for more righteousness.

**Mercy** is something given to those who don’t deserve love and kindness.

Being a **peacemaker** means that peace has been broken.

**Persecution, reviling, and falsely uttering all kinds of evil** are not hallmarks of a perfect society.

How many of those saints previously mentioned lived through unpeaceful times,

were veterans not only of spiritual warfare, but also of wars between countries and nationalities?

How many of those saints died under an excruciatingly painful martyrdom,

or bore the cross of false accusations for the faith, or were castigated by co-workers for Jesus’ sake?

How many mourned on account of the evil perpetrated against them or against others,

as well as the evil that they themselves had inflicted?

These all lived in this same sin-filled world and had their own crosses to bear.

These all prayed such petitions in their prayers as we pray in the Prayer of the Church where we pray

*For the sick, the infirm, and the shut-in; for the lonely, the depressed, and the mentally ill;*

*for the widowed and all orphans; for those who live with undue fear and anxiety,*

*and all others in need, that God would grant peace and comfort.*

And they all testify to us now, just as the resurrected Jesus says,

**“Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on.”**

And the Holy Spirit also confirmed, **“Blessed indeed, that they may rest from their labors.”**<sup>Rev.14:13</sup>

So these blessings that Jesus pronounces are the perfect thing for those who are struggling on the inside

...not that upon hearing them, all your problems will just disappear.

But that these blessings pronounce a present blessing with a future hope to look forward to...

and hope is a very powerful thing in dark days.

You see, the devil would love for you to think only of the evil you see around you, and feel inside you.

He wants to take away your hope and make you feel as if you are all alone with your guilt.

What he is trying to do is divorce you away from your Savior.

He wants to separate you from His Word so that you no longer believe the promises

of full and free forgiveness in Christ, of an eternal life without guilt or suffering.

He wants to separate you from His Sacraments,

so that you forget about your Baptism into Christ, when He took you into Himself.

so that you neglect the Holy Communion where He comes and unites Himself into you.

If the devil can make Jesus seem far away and distant, or at least not present with you...

If he can make you feel unworthy so that you lose hope of eternal life,

then he is close to his goal of your eternal destruction.

And if he can make Jesus’ own words sound hopeless, then he might just synch his victory over you.

And this might be the temptation: that when we hear Jesus speak His blessings upon the **poor in spirit**,

those who **mourn**, the **meek**, the **merciful**, the **pure in heart**, and the **peacemakers**

we think, “Well, I am none of that, or at least, not perfectly. So what is to become of me?”

“I should not **inherit the earth**, nor the **kingdom of heaven**.

“Will I receive **mercy** or be **comforted** as a **son of God** and **see God**?”

...

But here, we must go back to what the Lord has promised in His word.

In Holy Baptism, He washes away your sin, drowns the Old Adam, that inherited sinful nature, and gives you a new spiritual life, and the righteousness of Christ.

In your Baptism, the Father gave you Jesus' life of **poverty in spirit** (or humility) and **meekness** that **mourns** over sin.

In your Baptism, He made you a **child of God**,

that means that you are an heir with Jesus of the **kingdom of heaven**, and will **inherit the earth**.

And along with your Baptism, He attaches this promise, “**Surely, I am with you...**”

You are never alone or by yourself.

And to reinforce His presence, Jesus gives Himself to you, His very ***Body and Blood***, ***given and shed for you for the remission of sin***.

Here He **satisfies** your **hunger and thirst for righteousness**

and fills you with His **comfort** as you receive the forgiveness of sins in your mouth.

Here He showers you with His **mercy** as He has made peace between you and God through His death and resurrection.

These gifts of Word and Sacrament are what sustained the saints who have gone before you.

Through their difficult times, the Lord was with them and blessed them. He gave them hope.

They were never forgotten or forsaken.

On the contrary, the Lord was with them and walked them safely through their difficulties and trials, and at last, led them through death, into eternal life, where they now await

the fulfillment of their Baptism, the resurrection of their glorified bodies to eternal life.

Now they are perfectly comforted and satisfied.

So what do you suppose that our cloud of witnesses from Parkland would say to you in your trials?

What would Eileen, Gloria, Lyla, Janet, Marvin, David, Brian, and Marie, say to you now:

Probably the same thing that our Lord said to His disciples on many occasions, “**Take heart.**”

You are not alone. The Triune God is with you. Your Savior is with you.

Blessed are those who live in Christ, for you are saints, holy and pleasing to God.

**Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on.**

**Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors.”**

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*