

In Jesus' name. Amen.

...as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus taught His disciples saying,] "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (ESV)

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

People loved by God,

The Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, calls you blessed... as we heard in the Gospel reading.

And yet, it can seem like a joke... after all, how many times have you been accused of being

poor in spirit, meek, hungry & thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker?

And, in fact, it might actually be the other way around, that people, especially those who know you, would encourage you to be more **meek** and **merciful** and so on.

Yet, "Blessed" He calls you none the less.

It may be that you do not consider yourself to be very strong in any one of those categories...

but the focus is not to be on you and what you may or may not be,

because unless you are a perfect **peacemaker**... or perfectly **meek**... or perfectly **pure in heart**,

your blessedness is one that has been received from Jesus, who was perfect in all those areas for you.

And that is just as true for you as it is for the 8 individuals that we remember today,

for Diane Corso, Anita Corso, Haidyn Easley, James Steele, Jesús Rodriguez, Steven Rose,

Patricia Langseth, and Don Perry who died since our last All Saints' Day observance.

None of them were perfect while they lived among us,

and yet, they had confessed that Jesus was their Savior, that He lived and died for them.

They were washed in Jesus' cleansing blood by Holy Baptism, and the Holy Spirit sanctified them,

He set them apart from the world, and made them holy.

By faith, they are blessed forever.

And through faith, you are blessed now and into eternity.

...

And in this blessed state, Jesus goes on to declare more remarkable things,

"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world."

These two statements are a matched set.

They are both declarative statements that your Savior makes about you, His blessed child, and the sacred role He has given you while you are yet in this world.

But be careful, Jesus' point isn't to try to make you saltier, or lighty-er,

as if you, by your own dedication and purpose, could make yourself more of a Christian.

It is simply to show that a natural byproduct of the presence of Christ's blessed saints in this corrupted world, is that others take notice.

Consider that when someone puts salt on steamed vegetables, you know it's there...

and you want it to be there because, without the salt, there is no joy in eating steamed vegetables. And the same is true with a lamp....

In a dark room, people know when a light has come into the room because it naturally gives off light. It is the natural characteristics of flavor and light that Jesus is making the connection with.

But again, be careful — the focus isn't to be on yourself.

Nobody appreciates a person who is impressed with their own piety, who goes about acting as if they are **THE salt of the earth**, the model of godly living, that everyone else should emulate.

Such thinking betrays a pride that is natural to the sinful man, instead of **meekness** from our Savior, and turns one into a different kind of salty — an unsavory kind.

And on the other hand, if we focus on ourselves, that we are to be **THE light of the world**, we can easily become a faintly burning wick, as we despair — as we lose hope of our salvation because we consider that we are not **pure in heart**, or **merciful**, or the **peacemaker** that would **give glory to our Father who is in heaven** among the people of this world.

So how is it that one maintains the natural saltiness and brilliance of light that Jesus speaks of? It isn't by a focus on ourselves, but the original and natural focus of a Christian on Christ.

What gives the proper humility and **meekness** in a Christian is recognizing the perfect **meekness** of the Son of God who **humbled Himself and took on our form, the form of a servant**,^{Philippians 2:} and *became man for us men and for our salvation*.

What teaches us mercy is remembering the **mercy** and compassion that Jesus had for all.

As Jesus suffered and died upon the cross, bearing your pride, your despair, your **impurity of heart**. He was the ultimate **peacemaker** and **mediator between God and man**,^{1Tim.2:5} between God & you.

Dear Christian brothers and sisters,

In keeping your focus on Christ and His work of salvation for you, it is inevitable that you will recognize all the more readily that you are not capable of being all or any of those blessed characteristics perfectly or otherwise.

And as that realization hits home time and time again, your appreciation of God's grace will grow, and don't be surprised when a craving and a hunger and thirst for Christ's righteousness grows, too, so that you are less and less focused on yourself and more and more focused on Jesus.

Your pastors got to see this with Anita Corso.

She would tell us the story of how, in her early adulthood, Pr. Theiste came for multiple visits.

At that time, she was looking for a different church because of issues at Parkland.

He helped her to see that though the congregation and her members did struggle with sin, it was God's grace that kept them coming back, to receive His holiness and His forgiveness each week.

Her hunger for that forgiveness, led to her joy, and to her desire to share that grace with the children in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School.

That hunger for Christ's forgiveness and righteousness is what motivated Jesús Rodriguez.

He came to us on Easter Sunday in 2021.

He left with tears in his eyes because he found a Lutheran Church

that preached “Christ and Him crucified and risen” for him and didn’t try to tear down that faith. While he had previously served as a pastor and missionary in other denominations, and even studied for ordination in another Lutheran synod, he found peace and joy as he received His Savior’s gracious Word in his daily devotions and weekly participation in the Divine Service.

We can speak of Patricia Langseth, who dearly desired to attend the Divine Service with her fellow Christians each week, but was prevented, at first by her husband Jim’s health issues then by her own as she continued to climb past the 100-year mark.

Diane Corso, also suffered with ill health for much of her life.

By the charity and kindness of friends, she was often able to join us here to receive her forgiveness and to bless the Lord’s name with hymns and prayers and thanksgiving.

Don Perry and Steven Rose both came to Parkland in their last years and months of their earthly lives, though both had also attended Parkland earlier on.

Health kept them from attending with you in person,

but they confessed their Savior with you in our regular pastoral visits.

Even though both men, by the admission of friends and family alike were “good men,”

they craved the word of absolution which gave them certainty of their eternal salvation.

For many of these saints, death was not a surprise.

Whether by age or general ill health, or by a diagnosis, they knew death was around the corner.

But for others, like 2-month-old Haidyn Easley, Jesús Rodriguez, and James Steele,

the Lord took them out of this world very unexpectedly.

As we reflect on such deaths, we remember the words of Ps. 90, the psalm by Moses,

teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

so that we may never be caught unprepared, whether death come suddenly or expectedly.

But how do we learn to number our days when we don’t know when they will end?

It’s not the count that matters.

Whether you die at 2 months or 100 years, or anywhere in between,

the **heart of wisdom** is one that counts, not your days on this earth, but Jesus’ days on this earth.

Wisdom looks for the Savior of the world and listens to His Words of forgiveness and peace,

sees His mercy, His meekness, His purity of heart, and His peacemaking.

It clings to the promises of God given at Baptism and cherishes the new eternal life in Christ.

It **hungers and thirsts** for the Lord’s Supper, regularly and often, letting Christ’s words,

“given and shed for you for the remission of sins,” ring in your ears and hearts with joy.

In that wisdom then, we look to the Lord for His grace and mercy, satisfied but also craving more.

And on this earth, as the Lord used these 8 saints and all the saints to season those around them,

so the Lord will use you, as He wills, that others may also thirst for His righteousness and holiness, instead of their own.

And in this world, as the Lord enlightened and sanctified these 8 saints along with the whole Church

so the Lord enlightens and sanctifies you, and puts you on a stand

to be a light to those in your house and beyond, that they may glorify their Father in heaven.

In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria