

The Festival of All Saints with the Sacrament of Holy Baptism for Sasha Brielle Starr

1 November, Anno Domini 2020

St. Matthew 5:1-12

Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Children of God, I pray that the words of our Lord and the words of the Apostle today have been a comfort to you in the midst of the chaos and turmoil that fills us and surrounds us. That is exactly why they are spoken. John was granted this vision precisely because God knows exactly how deeply you suffer, how depressed and anxious you are about your current situation in life, how exasperated you are about the state of the world. Most of us probably feel as though we are caught under a tidal wave, spinning aimlessly in every direction, being tossed helplessly about without a shred of control over what is happening. And all of this is magnified by the fact that what you believe according to the Word of God, is absolutely hated by a large portion of the world. At times, it probably seems as though your faith in Christ only makes things worse.

But, dear saints of God, there is a point to what you believe and what you confess. The reward of faith, eternal life and peace, will be given to you just as God has promised. Your hope is not in vain, though at times you may think “All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.” (Psalm 73:13) There is something good for God’s children at the end of the suffering of this world. You may not feel very blessed. In fact, you may feel as though you are cursed. You may feel desperate, ashamed, hopeless, or depressed. You may ask with the psalmist, “Who will show us any good?”

Thanks be to God, St. John does. He shows you what you long for, the very thing he longed for as he sat alone on Patmos, exiled for the very same faith which you confess. He reminds you that it is not hopeless and that at the appointed time you will have peace and rest from the tribulation of this sinful world. One day, all the glorious things which we speak of, which John describes in Revelation, things that right now seem fanciful and impossible,

will no longer be our future but our eternal present. This is the whole point of our faith. It's why we gather here together week after week. We want the joy of heaven. We want to stand with joy before God's throne. We want an eternity free from the crushing effects of sin that weigh so heavily on us now.

And one day you will have exactly that forever. But not now. Not for us who remain in this world. Now we must suffer. Now our lives must look the same as the life of our Lord and brother in the flesh, Jesus. Now we mourn. Now we pray to our Father who art in heaven where we are not. Now we can only talk to our loved ones through glass windows. Now we fear the death that may be lurking in our neighbor's breath. Now we watch as people are murdered and cities burn. Now we have to listen as politicians try to convince us that only they can save us. Now, sin and chaos and death run rampant through the earth destroying everyone and everything in their path. Now we must fight to protect the weakest among us from those who find them inconvenient and lose jobs and opportunities and friends because we dared to speak the truth.

However, you who now labor and are heavy-laden, though your life may seem anything but, believe Jesus when He tells you that the reality is that you who suffer so and are hated and persecuted for His Name, you who hate your life in the world because of the wickedness of your own sinful flesh and the wicked who surround you, you are blessed. He needs to say it and you need to hear it again and again because it is so counter-intuitive. Everything the world tells us and everything our flesh thinks is the exact opposite. But there is nothing surprising about that because the world, sold into sin and blinded by the devil's lies, hates everything about God, everything that is truly and actually good.

The world thinks that blessing is being strong and wealthy and independent. The wicked think that they are blessed when they get to live for themselves on their own terms, when they don't have to submit their own desires to the needs of their wife, their children, their church, and their neighbor. But such a person, according to our Lord, is not blessed. As Jesus says "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their

fathers did to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:24-26) If you are chasing after the blessings of this life and this world, beware, your treasure will fade away and what you thought was a blessing will be a curse for all eternity. If your love is given to the things of this world, then you will not be found among the multitude in heaven. Your lot will be only with the wicked in hell who filled their bellies in this world and neglected faith and love.

It always bears repeating that the kingdom of God turns the world’s wisdom on its head. Those whom the Lord calls blessed are precisely the ones that the world has no use for. They are weak and suffering and inconvenient. They live their lives for the benefit of others rather than themselves. They seek no glory or gain for themselves. They are abused and persecuted. They know they are unrighteous and so seek righteousness from God. They call evil things evil and are despised for it. They speak the truth and are reviled for it. They are called bigots. They are ostracized and silenced. Many are even forced to shed their blood as sacrifices to the world’s false gods. But what the world hates and despises is precisely that which our Lord desires and treasures. And in the end, the faith which we confess, which the world decries as foolishness, will be vindicated as the truth. Our shame will be our eternal glory and their glory will be the source of their eternal shame.

How wonderful that we have before us today a perfect example of the foolishness of man’s wisdom. In the eyes of the world, Sasha is nothing. She is helpless. She is weak. She cannot survive even a day on her own. Some in the world who have become utterly drunk on godless humanism and secularism would even say that Sasha is really little more than an expendable parasite who isn’t yet fully human. Some would deny the gift of Holy Baptism to such a little one because she doesn’t have the intellectual capacity to understand God. Like the disciples who rebuked those who brought their children to Jesus in faith that He might bless them, many today still turn children away until they are “old enough” for Jesus.

But Jesus is indignant at such hateful and godless thinking. He chastises the disciples who try to shoo the little ones away and insists “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” Then He ups the ante and says “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” Not only does Jesus insist

that children (infants according to Luke) are to be brought to Him, He holds them up as the truest example of faith. The kingdom of heaven, salvation, is a free gift given by God to those who receive it in humility. They bring nothing to the table of their own except their sin and that so that Jesus might take it away and bestow upon them eternal life. If we would be saved, we must become like Sasha - weak and helpless - not the other way around. We must lay aside all delusions of strength and independence and self-righteousness. We must become nothing that Christ and His gifts may become everything.

Dear Baptized children of God, do not seek to count yourself blessed according to the world. Do not chase after its pleasures or its wisdom. They are only death. You are already blessed because in the waters of Holy Baptism you have been given the righteousness of Christ and the promise of eternal life. Those faithful departed whom we will remember today already enjoy what we long for and what will one day be ours if we will endure, if we will suffer the world's rejection and cling only to the Blood of Jesus which covers the guilt of our sin. They are part of that mystical body of Jesus which John was blessed to behold and we are blessed to know through him. They enjoy in all its fullness what we here have by faith, veiled under tears and sorrow. One day that veil will be lifted and the tears and the sorrow will be wiped away forever. One day nothing will be hidden any longer and God's children will shine like the sun.

Rejoice. You are blessed. Your sins are forgiven. The Lord Jesus is with you. And to reassure you of the continued truth of this promise, the Lord has given you His very Body and Blood to eat and to drink, through which He declares to you again "You are the blessed ones. You are sons and daughters of the Most High God. Do not fear. Do not be dismayed. I am your God and you are my people." Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord and blessed are you who gather today around His altar and share with all the saints in His heavenly feast of victory.

In the Name of +Jesus.