

All Saints Day (Year C)

How do we live out God's call to sainthood? This week's readings affirm that all who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. God's saints today – including all who are baptized into Christ – are called to look ahead, to know the hope to which God calls. And God's saints are called to live now in the presence of God's promises, working toward their fulfillment.

Focus Scripture: Luke 6:20–31

Imagine the scene: Jesus goes up a mountain to pray and stays all night. The next morning he calls the disciples together and chooses twelve of them to be apostles (Luke 6:12–16). As they come down the mountain, there is an enormous crowd of people waiting for them, seeking healing. In this group there are other disciples, Jews (those noted as coming from Judea and Jerusalem) and Gentiles (those noted as coming from Tyre and Sidon). Jesus turns to the disciples and says, "Blessed are you..."

In this way the gospel of Luke begins Jesus' teaching commonly called the Beatitudes. These sayings are also recorded in Matthew 5:1–12. In Luke, this teaching marks the beginning of a period of instruction for the disciples before Jesus sends them out on their own (9:6). As Jesus teaches about the life of discipleship, he turns conventional human understanding upside down.

Luke reports Jesus' teaching as including four sets of blessings and woes. Poor/rich, hungry/full, weeping/laughing, and rejected/accepted form parallel pairings of blessing and woe. Jesus' use of the word "you" in each statement suggests that the crowd included individuals living in each of these situations.

As named in Deuteronomy 11:26–28, Jesus' hearers would have considered blessing to be a sign of God's favour and woe a sign of God's disapproval or judgment.

Jesus' message to those who would follow as disciples is one of astounding promise. Jesus speaks prophetically of the great reversal of human understanding that we encounter in the reign of God. As Jesus continues to teach, his message continues to reveal the surprising ways of God. For many in that crowd, Jesus' words may have seemed

full of justice and mercy. Others may have heard them as harsh judgment. Some may have wondered, perceiving that following Jesus was not going to be as easy as it may have first seemed.

Jesus' words call us and all the saints to gaze forward to the time when God's promises will be fulfilled. Those who weep now will laugh. Those who are hungry now will be filled. Those who are poor now will receive the riches of God's inheritance. With this future firmly in our gaze, the obstacles to faith become smaller, the path easier to navigate.

After giving thanks for the faith of the Ephesians, in **Ephesians 1:11–23** the writer affirms that, through the "seal" of the Holy Spirit, these saints in Ephesus are living in God's power and protection. The writer shares Paul's prayer that they will welcome Jesus the Christ as head of the church.

Written to encourage those being persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BCE, **Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18** relates Daniel's first vision and its interpretation. An angel explains to Daniel that four successive empires (or their rulers) will be destroyed by God and replaced by "the saints of the Most High" – those now suffering under Antiochus.

In **Psalm 149**, the psalmist calls God's faithful saints to praise God's saving acts and promises.

• • • • •

There are blessings and woes in life, and God's saints are not exempt. Yet, when we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. We have a role to play, along with the saints of old, in the story of God's saving work. What might we do, as individuals and as the church, to live into God's promises?



Focus Scripture
Luke 6:20–31

Additional Scriptures
Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11–23

**Almighty God,
thank you for
working in the
lives of all your
saints. Give us
faith to engage
the world
according to
your ways, living
in hope and
confidence of your
gift of salvation.
Amen.**

The Focus for Ages 3–5

Young children usually have no difficulty in seeing themselves as someone worthy and important. They are the stars in their own small worlds. How wonderful, then, for them to hear that God also considers them to be worthy and important – a blessing just as they are! Although playful, the gathering activity of placing the word “saint” before each child’s name reinforces, in a memorable way, the truth of their importance in God’s eyes. It also introduces the greater challenge for very young children, namely, seeing the importance of others in God’s eyes and imagining being a blessing to

others. After all, that’s what’s at the heart of a saint’s life.

The story from the gospel of Luke presents four very simple, yet highly effective, ways of being a blessing to others: sharing food, sharing possessions, offering comfort, and extending hospitality. In the Respond section, you’ll find three concrete ways for the children to integrate the idea of being a blessing. You may be able to think of other activities that might be appropriate for your own church situation. Pray that the children will continue to grow in their awareness of God’s blessing on them in all they do.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, Luke 6:20–31, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Gather materials for the worship area: *white cloth, white pillar candle, and Bible with a bookmark placed in the gospel of Luke.*
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.
- ❑ Bring *candlesnuffer, matches, and CD player, if possible.*

Gather

- ❑ Bring *Priscilla, the puppet, or another hand puppet.*
- ❑ Bring a *soft ball or beanbag.*

Engage

- ❑ Bring the *resource sheet “God’s Blessings”* (p. 5) and *self-adhesive “happy face” stickers.*
- ❑ Bring a *special party snack.*

Respond

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

- ❑ **Spreading God’s blessing:** *drawing paper, crayons or felt markers; option: invite member(s) of pastoral care team to visit the group.*
- ❑ **Thank you cards:** *crayons, felt markers, stickers and other craft supplies, glue sticks; make copies of resource sheet “Thank You Card” and cut out the card shapes.*
- ❑ **Serving project:** *cleaning bucket, mild detergent, sponges, paint shirts, recording of lively music*



All Saints Day (Year C)

Scripture

Luke 6:20–31

FOCUS To respond to Jesus' teaching about being a blessing.

Gather

Welcome children individually by saying "saint" before their names. For example: "Good morning, Saint Alison," or "How are you, Saint Jarrod?" Expect various reactions to this greeting and probably even some giggles. Mention that anyone who knows and loves God is called a saint, so everyone in this group is a saint.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Invite a child to spread the white cloth on the table, and place the Bible and the candle on it. Mention that this is a very special day called All Saints Day. It is a day to celebrate everyone who loves God.

Sing or listen to a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Pray Dear God,
thank you for everyone here,
and thank you for our church.
Thank you for this special day. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Priscilla, the puppet, introduces the theme

Leader: Good morning, Saint Priscilla.

Priscilla: Good morning... (*pause*). Saint Priscilla?

Leader: Yes, Saint Priscilla. Would you like to hear our names, too? (*Encourage children to say*

their "saint" names.) Today we are celebrating All Saints Day, and anyone who knows and loves God is called a saint...so, each of us is a saint. Saints are all ages and live all around the world.

Priscilla: I like that. Can we name some other saints that we know? (*Encourage children to name people they know who love God and follow Jesus.*)

Leader: Imagine what it would be like if everyone who loved God and followed Jesus came together for a party!

Priscilla: That would be so much fun! That would be a huge party.

Leader: Yes, it would. There are so many, many people who have learned about God's love through Jesus. And so many, many people who show God's love to others. (*Place Priscilla nearby or say goodbye to her.*)

Game If not using Priscilla or another puppet, or after the puppet conversation, invite children to sit in a circle to play a game. Throw the ball or beanbag to a child saying, "Who are you?" The child catching the ball or beanbag will reply, "I follow Jesus. I am Saint (*child's name*)." Play continues in this manner until every child has had a chance to throw and catch the ball. If time permits play the game again with a different question such as, "Who loves God?" or "Who follows Jesus?"

Engage

Invite children to sit in a circle. Ask a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Luke. Place the open Bible in the middle of the circle and say, "It's story time – time to tell, to listen, and to remember together." Lead the children in the story on the resource sheet "God's Blessings," based on **Luke 6:20–23**.

After the story

Sing "We Are a Blessing" (*tune: "If You're Happy and You Know It"*)

We're a blessing and we know it,
let's clap hands.

We're a blessing and we know it,
let's clap hands.

We're a blessing and we know it,
and God asks us all to show it.

We're a blessing and we know it,
let's clap hands.

(Other verses: let's stamp feet, let's turn around, let's shake hands...)

Each time a verse is sung, encourage the children to think of one way to show God's blessing, mime that action for the group, and then invite everyone to mime it together.

Celebration snack We're all saints of God! Celebrate all the saints that have helped us learn more about God's love. Say a prayer together and share a special party snack.

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

- Spreading God's blessing** When we do loving things for others, we are spreading God's blessing. Talk with the children about some of the things that the minister and members of a pastoral care team do, especially visiting people who are sick or sad. Or, invite your guest(s) to talk about this. Ask children to draw special pictures to help bring a blessing to others. Make arrangements for the drawings to be delivered by the clergy or pastoral care team.
- Thank you cards** There are many people in the church community who bring blessings to others through their volunteer work because they love God, and they want to help others. Invite children to make cards to distribute



to these "saints" by colouring and decorating cards from the resource sheet "Thank You Card."

- Serving project** Young children often love to help clean up. Use this as an opportunity to affirm that working together is part of living in God's way. Invite children to prepare washable toys and the furniture that is to be washed by placing protective plastic sheets. Have them put on paint shirts to protect clothing. Set out a bucket with a small amount of warm, soapy water and have them use sponges to clean the furniture. Play lively music or sing familiar songs as you work. Affirm that the children are great workers!

Bless

Gather around the worship table and light the candle again. Invite children to join hands in a circle.

Sing or listen to a blessing song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources.

Pray Dear, God,
thank you for all the people who love us,
and who teach us more about you. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), God blesses you and loves you."

Reflect

Consider all the ways in which the children are a blessing in your congregation. How might you encourage and enable further the blessing presence of children?



Story Tip

Story time can sometimes be a little chaotic. Be reassured that the children absorb far more than may be apparent.

God's Blessings

(based on Luke 6:20–23)

(Have small self-adhesive stickers available. Teach the refrain, "God blesses you" and say it several times.)

Jesus was so happy! Jesus was surrounded by children. Jesus liked children. And children liked Jesus. Children liked Jesus because he smiled at them and laughed with them and made them feel important.

One day, when Jesus was sitting with many children, he noticed a little child sitting nearby. *(Invite a child to take a sticker and place it on the hand of one of the children in the group.)* Jesus said, "Welcome, friend! I see that you are hungry. God doesn't want anyone to be hungry, so we'll share our food with you." And then Jesus said, "All people who are hungry will be blessed."

Children say: **God blesses you.**

Then Jesus noticed a child standing off to one side. *(Invite a child to take a sticker and place it on another child's hand.)* Jesus said, "Welcome, friend! I see that you don't have enough clothes or a place to live. God wants everyone to have what they need. We'll share our things with you." And then Jesus said, "All people who have very little will be blessed."

Children say: **God blesses you.**

As Jesus looked around, he saw someone who had been sad. *(Invite a child to take a sticker and place it on another child's hand.)* Jesus said, "Welcome, friend! I see that you have been crying. God doesn't want anyone to stay sad. We'll be a loving friend to you." And then Jesus said, "All people who need love and care will be blessed."

Children say: **God blesses you.**

And then Jesus spread out his arms and, with a big, big smile, said to all the children *(place stickers on the rest of the children)*, "Welcome, friends! All children help us to know about God and God's love. And all children will be blessed."

Children say: **God blesses us.**

The children looked at each other. The children looked at Jesus. "Yes," they said, "Jesus is our friend. And Jesus teaches us how to live together with love. Jesus teaches us that when everyone has food, clothes, and a place to live; when everyone has a friend; when everyone loves God like us; then everyone will jump with joy." *(Everyone stands up and jumps.)*



Thank You Card

Instructions

- Cut out the card along the outside solid lines.
- Colour in the heart shape.
- Fold along the dotted line to form a card, with the heart inside.
- Decorate the front and inside of the card.

Thank you

You are a blessing to our church.