

This Sunday observes All Saints Day. We will be remembering those blessed ones who dwell now in the presence of God as part of the Communion of Saints. But on this side of the grave, who are the ones blessed of God? Jesus speaks of such blessed ones in Matthew and Luke in the so-called “beatitudes.” But make no mistake: more is involved here than attitudes. Familiar as they may be, the blessings startle with their world-turned-upside-down nature of those blessed of God. Put another way, those blessed to be in the Communion of God’s Counter-Intuitives.

It may be that we are more familiar with the eight blessings recorded by Matthew that begin his account of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Luke has only four blessings that in his record of a Sermon on the Plain. But Luke and Matthew differ on far more than setting or number of blessings. In Matthew, Jesus pronounces the blessings in the third person: “blessed are *the* . . .” It is the style of a teacher imparting knowledge, as Matthew begins this passage with *disciples* (in Greek, “those who are taught”) coming to Jesus. In Luke, Jesus bestows the blessings in the second person: “blessed are *you*. . .” It is the style of a pastor exercising care, as Luke begins with a crowd coming to be healed not just by his words, but by Jesus’ touch. In Matthew, two of the blessings shared with Luke are qualified: “blessed are the poor *in spirit* . . . blessed are those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*.” In Luke, these blessings come with no such qualifiers: “blessed are you *poor* . . . blessed are you who are *hungry*.”

Such blessings are counter-intuitive. They are often out of step with what and who is seen as blessed in the eyes of the world, especially by powers rooted in dominance rather than service. But they are entirely in step with the words of psalmists and prophets and Messiah about the unlikely ones God blesses. You might even say they are in step with Mary, whose Magnificat and perhaps lullabies sang of the ones God will bless through her promise-borne son (Luke 1:52-53).

For Reflection and Action:

What thoughts or words come to mind as you hear the ones Jesus blesses?

When have you found yourself the recipient of such counter-intuitive blessing; the giver of?

What do these blessings bring to our celebration of All Saints Day?