

***Blessed are you ....*** (Mat 5:1-12).

\* Our liturgical calendar marks the first day of November as All Saints' Day. It occurs right after Reformation Day, thanks to Martin Luther. With an anticipation to obtain a larger public concern against the indulgences, Luther had chosen All Saints' Day to bring out the 95 Theses for discussion. He nailed that paper on the door of the Castle Church also known as All Saints' Church in Wittenberg on the Eve of All Saints. Occasionally it was a day when Frederick the Wise would offer his indulgences. In order to grasp Luther's intention in posting the 95 Theses on All Saints' Day, we wish to go on tour across history and theology.

\* In Luther's Theses we've discerned the three concepts: - an objection against the false idea to receive forgiveness of sins in exchange for money; - a denial of the powers of the pope over purgatory; - and a consideration of the welfare of the sinner. With God's approval of what was written and done through M. Luther, Jesus says, *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied*, (Mat 5:6). To that effect, three of Luther's concepts were established and they attained on eternal purpose.

\* Regarding the celebration of All Saints' Day we've learned that from apostolic times the Church started venerating the faithful who by their suffering and death glorified the name of their Lord. Those faithful were called saints. Later the notion of saints was extended over all godly people who have attained the beatific vision in heaven. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*, says Jesus. (Mat 5:8 ),

\* Now, we have the questions for debate, as they would be directed to our generation by M. Luther. Friends, asks Luther, are the holy people freed from their sins by virtue of Christ's merits or by Peter's merits? Second question, Do the keys of the pope effect the reconciliation with God or do the saints' contrition addressed to Jesus reconcile them with God? And the third question, Do papal indulgences remove saints' guilt or does Christ himself remove saints' guilt? These questions have been debated among church people and have been answered in the press. Combining All Saints' Day and the 95 Theses into a single entry helped Luther to reach the point in the discussion where the papal autocracy over Christ' Church was taken from Rome. However, the cost of it was the bloody war, which lasted 30 years; that war tremendously decreased the population in Western Europe, especially in Germany. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. (Mat 5:10 ), says Jesus.

\* For the benefit of our listeners, we need to define the meaning of the word "saint" as it was understood by the prophetic writers and by the public. According to a recent Religion News report, less than a third of Canadians believe in hell and a bit more than a half believe in heaven. It says about 53 % believe in life after death. In the US, there is more optimistic result. 77 % believe about making it to heaven,

according to a 2004 Gallup poll. Those who participated in the surveys might know that heaven is a dwelling place for saints and hell for the ungodly. Therefore, 77 % of Americans who hope to be in paradise should identify themselves with saints or at least with candidates for saints. Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven .... (Mat 5:12).

\* It is good to have hope for a bright eternal future but in order to be sure that we are saints, let's explore the meaning of the word "saint". Its usage originates from the Hebrew word – kadosh, and the Greek word – hagios. Both words convey two meanings – of being righteous and of being consecrated (set apart) for God as his own. It can be translated either as "holy one" or as "saint." It is common mistake thinking of one's saintship as the result of moral personal achievements already made. For example, a man might believe that God has uplifted him because he is a good person. In fact, there is no reason for boasting, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Rom 3:23). The Scripture teaches clear, our saintship is the declaration for Christ's sake that bases on faith rather than on good deeds, (1Co 1:27-31).

\* The Scripture and our self-evaluation confirm the truth that any horrible sins in the world can be found in our fallen nature. The bad news here is that the lost image of God affected all humanity; but the worth of all is that people were turned into the image of the devil, (Joh 8:44). Thanks be to Jesus Christ for a victory over sin and death. For Christ's sake God forgives our sins. The good news is that God's own people become capable to walk by the Spirit; the life under God's grace forms within us the godly and holy character, (1Pe 2:9-12). Christ's beauties enable us to love Jesus and his Church; the losing image of Love was planted again, it takes root and it grows. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God,* (Mat 5:9), says Jesus.

\* The good sermon is one that provides a good example. Logically on All Saints' Day we should mention at least one saint. In my last sermon and at the beginning of this one, I referred to M. Luther who is called among us as a saint and German prophet. Two other saints whom I want to talk about are remembered this month, on Nov. 5 and 19. They are Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist and Elizabeth of Hungary. Both women are remembered by generations due to their election that enabled them to live godly lives. Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist was childless for many years until God granted her with a baby at her advanced age. The woman showed her saintship by walking in all the commandments of the Lord without blame, (Luke 1:6). Elizabeth called her cousin Mary "the mother of my Lord" after being enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Later she gave birth to John who became the forerunner of Christ. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,* (Mat 5:5), says Jesus.

\* By the same token, Elizabeth of Hungary, A.D. 1231, during her marriage with Louis, the Landgrave of

Thuringia, supported the poor, built hospitals, cared for the dying. To that effect she became a symbol of Christian charity. Elizabeth was distinguished as a saint after her death for her exclusively devotional and charitable character. The fact of Elizabeth's election by God was proved by her outstanding love of the poor and of her self-denial. *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy, (Mat 5:7)*, says Jesus.

\* Finally, we are ready to answer the rhetorical question, *Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where they have come? (R.7:13)*. We are surely longing for being among these clothed in white robes. But *we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment, (Isaiah 64)*. Thanks be to Jesus forever and ever; by the blood of the Lamb our inner garments will be purified and never stained again. There is no mediator between our contrite hearts and Jesus, says the Word; there is no one under heaven who can make us holy except Jesus. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, (Mat 5:3)*, says Jesus. Amen