This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. In the Gospel we hear the first 12 verses of the greatest sermon every preached – the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). The first 12 verses are known as the Beatitudes. In the Beatitudes, Jesus gives us much more than a list of do's and don'ts; He teaches us the interior attitudes or dispositions which lead the human person to ultimate fulfillment – "Blessedness" – in this life and for all eternity. In a word, He teaches us what it means to be human, to be fully alive, to be a Saint; He teaches us how to love. Every human being wants to be happy. Unfortunately, we know happiness can be illusive. In our fallen state, we are easily deceived about what leads to true happiness and to make matters worse, we are often too weak to choose rightly even when we know what is best! Jesus, in the Beatitudes, paints us a portrait of the truly happy, "blessed," soul.

Obviously, we cannot exhaust the meaning of the Beatitudes in one page; I offer here a single thought or two for each:

Blessed are the poor in spirit. The poor in spirit are humble—they know themselves to be radically dependent on God for any good they possess. Therefore, they never exalt themselves above others.

Blessed are those who mourn. Those who mourn are compassionate; they understand God's perfect goodness and love and therefore they weep for their own sins and for the sins and sufferings of all.

Blessed are the meek. The meek are in control of themselves. They do not retaliate when provoked. They do not return insult for insult, but a blessing instead. They turn the other cheek. They love their enemies.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are not passive. They forcefully desire to be holy and passionately respond to those who suffer injustice.

Blessed are the merciful. The merciful are quick to forgive others as God has forgiven them. They readily engage in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Blessed are the single-hearted (pure of heart). The single-hearted are without guile; their life is centered on one thing, the most important thing: doing God's will. They are not hypocrites—what you see is what you get. They do not try to impress others by "practicing their righteousness before men" (Mt 6:1) or by putting on a show of righteousness.

Blessed are the peacemakers. The peacemaker is the one who continuously, in good times and bad, abandons his life and soul to God's providence and thus maintains peace with God. Having the peace of the Lord within, the peacemaker communicates peace to others.

Blessed are those persecuted for holiness sake. Courage consists of a willingness to suffer in order to attain the higher good. Those willing to suffer for holiness sake are truly courageous.

Jesus' teaching is radical, but it is absolutely true! For many in our culture, happiness is thought to be gained by more money, more pleasure, more entertainment, more comfort, parties, etc…. While all these things have their rightful place, they cannot take the place of the Beatitudes. Jesus' teaching inspires us to walk with Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. True happiness is reserved for the humble, compassionate, meek, righteous, merciful, single-hearted, peaceable, courageous. In a word, happiness is the fruit of love, and the true meaning of human love is fully revealed to us, not in a book or a philosophical construct, but in a Person: Jesus. To be with Jesus, and to be like Jesus, is to be blessed . . . is to be a Saint!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples