

All Saints' Day
Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10, Psalm 149, Matthew 5:1-12
November 1, 2015
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One of the most beautiful churches we visited in Israel is found on top of a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The grounds were lush with well-manicured green grass, palm trees, varieties of flowers in bloom and tranquil water fountains. From nearly every turn, visitors had magnificent views of the blue Sea of Galilee below.

This was the Church of the Beatitudes, where it is thought Jesus may have delivered his sermon on the mount as found in Matthew's gospel. Each of the nine beatitudes, beginning with *Blessed*, were on plaques in English surrounding the church on a pathway through the gardens. They were also written in Latin in the stain glass as part of the dome inside the church. Maybe because there weren't scores of tourists there when we visited, it was truly a blessed place of peace and happiness.

The Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount are chosen for All Saints' Day because here Jesus is defining aspects of saintly behavior and their earthly and heavenly rewards. The beatitudes describe people who simply and readily trust God, are naturally humble, forgive quickly, hurt when others hurt, refrain from aggression in both word and action, and are willing to suffer for doing that which is right, good and noble.

Few people meet all these requirements for sainthood, but we all know people who show that extra portion of holiness in one or a few of these ideals – people who have a special spirit that surpasses our common human nature.

Sometimes these people come into our lives for only a brief period of time. This morning I am thinking about an Episcopal priest I recently met in our two-week course at St. George's College. Mike is from Texas and has a church near San Antonio. He may have been the youngest member of our group. He was very quiet and humble even though he had a doctorate in theology. We knew he was a man of deep prayer. Right away Juanita and I invited him to join us when we went exploring during our free time, and he was glad to since his wife was home in Texas.

Mike was nearly always willing to walk with me to visit the more hard-to-get-to sights when Juanita and other group members thought it was too strenuous. It would have been a far less interesting trip for me without Mike's male companionship and constant good cheer. He also showed me where to buy beer and wine and joined us every evening before dinner for a drink and reflection upon the day's events.

Maybe you have had a Mike in your life or someone else that acts as a saint toward you. During the quiet music, you are invited to come forward and light a candle for that someone who has provided much appreciated light upon your path in life.