

"No More Curse"

Revelation 22:3-5

November 7, 2010

All Saints' Day

The San Francisco Giants recently won the World Series and much was made that they hadn't won the championship since before they moved to San Francisco from New York in 1958. Before that, there was much talk of a curse with regard to the Boston Red Sox. After winning the World Series in 1918, the Boston Red Sox sold Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees because the owner of the Sox was a Broadway producer and needed cash to produce plays. Supposedly, because of that, the Red Sox lived under the "Curse of the Bambino" and were destined never to win the World Series again. For years, Sox fans were denied happiness and success, sometimes in the most bizarre ways, while other teams continue to win. Yes, they felt truly cursed.

Do you ever feel like you, as a Christian, are living under a similar curse by which you are denied happiness and success while others thrive? Do you long to have the curse lifted and for joy to be restored? All Saints' Day, which we celebrate this weekend, is a good time to remember the curse that afflicts us and how that curse is lifted.

While none of you have been put under a curse by baseball deal gone bad, all of us are under a curse, as the Bible defines curse. To be cursed means to be delivered up to the wrath and punishment of God. When Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, all of creation - Satan, mankind, plants, animals, and the earth itself were cursed by God and brought under His divine punishment. Sin would separate creation from its Creator and would plunge creation into the dark night of sin. Instead of a harmonious relationship with God and with each other, creation would experience conflict, strife, pain, suffering, and a multitude of other problems. Not only would people suffer this but all of creation would, as well. Mankind would no longer be free to live in God's immediate and gracious presence, but would be subject to death, Satan (who brought them into this mess) and hell itself.

We were unable to free ourselves from the curse by trying to turn from our sin and to obey God's Law from here on out. As much as we try to improve ourselves, our society, and our world, we only fall deeper into the curse. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."" (Gal 3:10) In other words, we are cursed - subject to the consequences of our sin and the punishment of Almighty God - if we fail to obey God's Law completely and consistently.

But God who pronounced the curse also intervened to lift the curse by sending His Son, Jesus, into this world. Jesus did not set about removing the curse of sin like we might do if we were in charge. He didn't try to improve people's moral character. He didn't try to change society. He didn't try to clean up the environment. In other words, He didn't do anything to try to deal with the effects of the curse. Rather, Jesus took the curse itself upon Himself. As Paul further writes to the Galatians, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."" (Gal. 3:13)

By hanging on the tree of the cross, Jesus transferred the curse which was on us to Himself in order to release us from the curse. In fact, so complete was His acceptance of the curse that He became the curse. As it says in 2nd Corinthians, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God took the sin of the world and the curse which that sin deserved, placed those on His only Son, Jesus, made Him to be the curse and be sin...why? So that in Christ, we might become the righteousness of God. By Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, the entire world was declared to be righteous or holy in God's eyes, rather than cursed.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, working in your baptism and through the hearing of the Word of God, you have come to faith...that is, to believe that what Jesus accomplished for the world, He accomplished for you and that the righteousness He won for the world is your righteousness. That makes you a saint. For a saint is not someone who has attained extraordinary moral accomplishments. The word "saint" simply means "holy one" and through faith in Jesus Christ, you are a holy one of God.

As God's saints, are we to expect a blessed and glorious life here because we are His saints? Not at all. For while the curse itself has been taken care of for you and me (that is, we are no longer under God's wrath and doomed to His everlasting punishment), we live in a world where the effects of the curse are still present. We will suffer the effects of sin as human beings in this sinful world and we will even suffer more as God's saints in a world under the domination of Satan.

Yet it is in that rejection and persecution by the world that we can truly find our blessedness now for it shows that we are no longer under the curse of God. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus tells what true blessedness is. It is not in the accumulation of wealth, a life of total happiness, and the acceptance of other people. In fact, it is just the opposite of what the world considers blessed. Jesus says,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Our blessedness comes, not because what we have now, but because of who we are now - God's saints - and what we shall have later. And, because of who we are *now* and what we have *later*, we are truly blessed

Our text from the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, describes what it is that is coming later for us, as God's saints. It says, "No longer will there be any curse." Not only will the curse of sin and eternal death which has been gone for all of God's saints since Jesus uttered those words, "It is finished!" on the cross be done away with, but all of the effects of that curse will be gone as well - the corruption, pain, and suffering which we see around us. As John wrote in the previous chapter of Revelation, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Rev. 21:4-5)

For us and all of God's saints, our lives of poverty, mourning, meekness, and persecution will be vindicated. John describes the lives of the saints earlier in Revelation: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Everything will be reversed for us, for all who have gone before us in faith, and for all who will follow us in faith. Instead being separated from God by sin and only enjoying the presence of God through His Word and through His Holy Sacrament, we will enjoy His direct presence. "They will see his face," our text says, "and his name will be on their foreheads. Instead of the darkness of sin which engulfs us now and plagues our every waking moment, "There will be no more night," our text says. "They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light." And, instead of being subject to Satan, to those who, under his influence made our lives miserable on earth, and to death itself, we and all the saints will have no masters or oppressors. "And *they* will reign for ever and ever."

When the "cursed" Boston Red Sox started to become successful, there was a lot of talk by fans and the media to "reverse the curse." And, you know what? They did. For the first time since 1918, the Boston Red Sox won the World Series and were declared the World Champions in 2004. The curse was officially dead and gone. As we come to church every Sunday, we, in a sense, are coming to "reverse the curse" of sin. As we remember our baptisms and hear the absolution, we know that the curse has been reversed for us and that we are the saints of God. As we celebrate All Saint's Day, we rejoice that, for our loved ones who have died in the faith, the curse has been fully reversed. They have won, not a World Series victory, but the golden crown of life and their eternal rest in heaven. And we look forward, through misery, disappointment, and suffering here, to the day when the curse will finally be reversed completely for us, as well. Amen.