

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven
November 2, 2025

Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets."

"But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. ~Luke 6:20-31

Before having the privilege of serving here at St. Thomas's Day School, I was chaplain to the Nursery School for several years at Calvary Church in Stonington. I've shared a couple of vignettes from my time there, and I have another today. We always started chapel with a favorite ritual known the "Thank You" song. We sat in a circle and I would ask each child in turn, "Can you think of something so wonderful in your life that you'd like to say 'thank you' to God for it?" One day we welcomed a new 3-year-old named Jack. He was about midpoint through the circle, and by the time we got to him, he'd heard us sing "thank you" for various things we each loved, like firetrucks, race cars and unicorns, and I could tell by his eyes that he too had something he wanted to give thanks for. I asked him, he took a breath, and he said, "Thank you, Lord, for the *moon and the stars.*" The teachers and I smiled as we realized a mystic had joined the group and indeed that's exactly who he was in our little group for the rest of the year.

Here at St. Thomas's, I've come to realize that children are naturally mystics. They love to zoom out and see the bigger picture; they have no trouble at all entering that realm that lies beyond, just out of sight. In the fourth grade, we would talk about nothing else but the angels, the demons and the cosmic battles if I didn't insist at some point that we move on. At age nine, they're able to go there in an instant and they love to stay there and see what lies beyond, savoring and in fact

remembering every detail. For them, it's very simple. The moon and stars and angels are just as real to them, if not more, than the stop signs and roads and bumpers that tend to saturate our more earthly fields of sight. They are able, in fact, to zoom out and see what is ultimately real; the realm toward which Jesus points in every word he offered, the place into which he welcomed us in every gesture and touch and vignette and image as our only true home, the one ultimate reality amongst all of this, wonderful as it is, that is passing and fleeting.

Now maybe it's not quite as easy for us, but sometimes we do get ourselves there too. From where we stand here on Whitney Avenue, *zooming out* and glimpsing the real might be as simple as a trip across the street that way to Edgerton or that way to East Rock Park in a season such as this one to walk the paths and bridges, to enter the woods, to go into the forest and behold that evanescent yet radiant kaleidoscope of yellow, orange and red on the trees and underfoot, or perhaps to hear little else other than the gentle crunch of leaves along the pathways, with the world *right there* yet suddenly and wonderfully far away. It won't be long before one of those days when it snows that beautiful white blanket of powder and the world goes silent at least for a few hours, when the acoustic of the woods changes and its hush takes us far, far away. I remember my walks down my street in Stonington, which is the first town along the shoreline that's actually on the Atlantic, just beyond the Sound, and where I've never before or since seen the stars and constellations so brightly and vividly. Looking up was the best kind of zooming out; when you looked back down you couldn't help but see the current moment and all you were carrying just a little bit differently.

The ancient Greeks looked up at those same stars and in looking up believed they had solved a mystery, one that still intrigues us today. [play a few chords] Why is it that we find these combinations of notes so beautiful, so compelling? Why do they delight our ears the way they do? For the ancients, a zoom-out to those gorgeous patterns in the skies suggested an answer: those constellations reflect nothing less than *the mind of God*. The distance between notes in a beautiful harmony is that same distance we see between the stars and thus a reflection of that divine mind. Harmony, intervals, distances between stars, the divine mind. It's quite a theory and quite a bold claim, and interestingly in 2500 years no one has really come up with a better one. What we *can* say with certainty is that music takes us somewhere, just as a walk in the woods does, that it allows us like very little else to *zoom out* and see something we might not otherwise. It takes us into that *beyond* that my fourth-graders love so much. We go there, we enter it, we subsume ourselves in it, it's the only thing that matters while we're there, and we come back refreshed.

And so, my friends: Here's what this great day in the church year says to us. *Go there*, it says. Go there often. Go there whenever you possibly can. Follow the young people and the other mystics there. Let them lead you there to that place where you can zoom out to what's real, knowing that things will look a bit different when you zoom back in; that you will come back fresh, ready to re-enter and see this world more clearly. Today is the day we zoom out to behold the saints and their dwelling place; this is All Saints Day, a day when we set the table a bit differently, when we bring out our Easter linens and vestments, when we celebrate those who came before, those who lived lives of love and dedication and — this is what the church most wants us to know on this radiant day — those *with whom we share eternal fellowship*, who walk with us still, who stand with us, who fill us with hope, who continue as our companions along this way, the one they walked, the one we walk still.

The church invites us today to go there, to be with them, to glimpse and behold them as we read their names and reflect, as we do so, on those things that the faith and tradition have taught us:

✦first, that the good work begun in them *goes on*, as the church has taught with confidence now for nearly 2000 years. That work God began in our beloved departed didn't end here, and it didn't stop when they left our sight, we are assured. In some way, beyond our knowing, the good work begun in them here goes on;

✦second, that they *are* still with us; that their departing this earthly presence makes them no less real in our lives, and in fact *no less real*; that they now inhabit an ultimate realm, near to God, and that we share communion with them in eternal fellowship; that when we say "I still feel them with me," that's something very real we know as *fellowship with the saints* across time and place and realm; that when we allow ourselves to zoom out, we can know, with the church, that this is not nostalgia or sentiment; that, far from it, this is nothing less than the *ultimately real* we've simply finally allowed ourselves to see;

✦and finally that we, like them, and with them, are also being shaped and refined right now; that the good work *begun in us* too goes on even here; that as hair turns grey or as life doesn't always go the way we thought it should or were told it would; as we each walk our own way with its inevitable disappointments, false turns and stumbles, that the same fire burns through us as it did through them, refining us, softening our defenses and burning away our artifice, shaping us evermore in inextinguishable love as vessels of Christ in the world, fueled by the fire and love that lie at the heart of this most holy and radiant day. Thanks be to God. Amen.