

Cycle A Homily
Feast of All Saints
November 1, 2011
Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

It may seem strange, but we can learn so much from the scientific experiments that seem to be so simple.

I read about two fish in a fish tank. A scientist conducted an experiment by placing a clear sheet of glass standing up right in the center of the fish tank with one fish on each side.

He observed for a few days after putting the partition there. The fish would swim up to the partition, then turn away, swim as far as they could to the other side, then swim back to the partition again. The cycle kept repeating.

Then the scientist removed the partition. Guess what happened? The fish kept doing what they were doing when the partition was there. The fish would swim up to where the partition used to be, then turn away, swim as far as they could to the other side, then swim back to where the partition used to be again. The cycle kept repeating, even though the partition was gone!

The fish had gotten so much into the habit of this behavior that they did not even consider changing once the glass was removed.

Now, this might seem silly to us. But, think about it. Are not people very much like this? We set up barriers between ourselves and other people, like hatred, greed, violence, and gossip. We set up barriers between ourselves and God, like ingratitude, excessive pride in our own efforts, living as if the thing of this passing world were God.

The truth is, we know better than the fish. Or, at least we should.

Think about those barriers between ourselves and other people. Think, too, about those barriers between ourselves and God. How do we take them out of the tank we know as life in this world?

That's where we turn to today's Gospel. What does Jesus tell us? He taught us lessons known as The Beatitudes. He tells us to break down those barriers by living as He taught.

He kept using the word *blessed*. Some people say *blessed* means happy, but it means much more than that. *Blessed* means to be in a truly privileged, fortunate circumstance. It means truly happy, totally fulfilled, exactly the very best situation one can know.

We break down those barriers if we acknowledge our dependence on God.

We don't just do that once in life. We do that day by day, even many times over in a day. Totally depending on God means totally relying on His love.

How often do we fool ourselves into thinking anything other than love can make us fully happy?

That very first Beatitude says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." It is the key to all the teachings that follow. If we don't listen to it, we won't hear anything else God teaches. It means we are truly happy when we fully open our hearts to however God wants to fill us with His love, and we embrace the truth that with this love nothing can conquer us.

We honor all the saints today. Why? Does this honor we give to them mean anything to those who have completed life's journey and are now with God? Does it make them any greater?

Saint Bernard preached a sermon about this. He tells us that saints have *no need* of our honor. Our admiration for them does *not* make them greater.

So why honor the saints? We honor them because they teach us so much about breaking down the barriers people make between people, and they teach us so much about breaking down the barriers people make between themselves and God. In other words, the saints were poor in spirit. They opened their hearts and asked God to fill them with His love. They knew their own imperfections.

On a very basic level, the saints listened to Jesus. They followed Him without losing heart, or at least they did their very best more often than not.

Their lives teach us to experience being blessed, the true joy of trusting in God day by day and many times a day.

The wise author Teilhard de Chardin wrote that someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love. And it will be then that for the second time in the history of the world people will have discovered fire!

Let me close by leading us to think one more time about that experiment involving the two fish with the glass wall between them. Even after the wall was removed, they imagined it was still there.

Saints are people who know that Jesus took away the wall we built between ourselves and God, and this should help us see the Christ in all people.

Master the waves if we can, learn more about the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity. But most of all discover many times over the love of the Lord. Let Him take the barriers away.

Then we'll know what it means to be blessed.