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## *Blessed Are Those Who Are Pure of Heart for They Will See God*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell  
Choral Evensong for All Faithful Departed  
All Saints' Day – Year A**

*[unedited transcript:]*

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Did you ever wonder what blessed actually means when it's used in the beatitudes? Is that a formal action rendered by a priest of the church? Is it a personal experience of warmth and comfort that we have when we're in the presence of God? Is it something that relates to the here and the now? Or is it something that relates to the hereafter? Thomas Keating, one of the popular writers of the contemporary centering prayer movement translates this word and the beatitudes, not as blessed, but as happy. Happy are those who are pure in heart for they will see God. In effect, he makes it a wisdom, saying he makes it clear that it's about us and it's about now. Happy are those who are pure in heart for they will see God.

One of my favorite images for what seeing God might look like and feel like comes from music and in particular, from Jacqueline du Pre, who was a British cellist. She was magnificent and she is famous for the recording of Elgar's concerto. You can find it on YouTube if you go to look it up. She performed this concerto once in Europe and was so magnificent that for a short time, after that people refused to perform it. If you watch her play the cello, it is as if she is bringing the music to life. Here is this free, independent, talented woman, musician, who is dedicating all of that freedom and all of that talent and all of that independence to making this music live. You never lose sight of her. And yet she brings something bigger than her to life. There is a light in that music, if you will. And she allows it to shine through her in a way that we can all see.

That's what I think it means to be blessed. That's what I think it means to be happy. It is to find that light of Christ that is available to us in us and let it be seen so that others may sense what it looks like and see the world through its light.

We are all gathered here today because we are remembering, commemorating, and in some cases, mourning and lamenting people that we loved, members of our families or friends, or even people that we know, but we miss them. They are the faithful departed. As many of you know, my father died several years ago. He died in the fall. So All Saints Day was one of the first days I was confronted with his absence. My father had been my hero all of my life, everything I did, I measured by my image of him. When you did this, but dad did that. You are this, but dad was that. Even today, he is always present in my thoughts. Sometimes when I don't even ask him, he nevertheless renders an opinion. And I don't always follow it, but I still am influenced by it.

In my chapel at home, it's a study, but my family likes to call it the chapel because I spend so much time there. I have two pictures of my dad. One is my father at the end of a golf swing. That pose when all the balance is perfect from his college days, he was a college golfer and there is a young man kind of rakish really handsome with perfect balance, with athletic skill for all to see and a confident gaze off into the future. And then there's another picture of my father, much older and with mother. He is sitting there and they are smiling as if these two have a third person they have both become. He is older and more gone. His coat seems to be too big.

He had that smile on his face accompanied by my mother's smile is so much different from the confident look of the college golfer. It is as if there had been two arcs in his life, this first arc of physical prowess and

achievement that seemed to have unlimited energy and yet ultimately of course, declines., It's a falling arc in the last part of life. And yet, even as that arc begins to fall, another arc begins to rise and that arc is an interior energy. That arc comes from integrated experience. And it's not about achievement so much as it is about knowing. It's an energy that comes from knowing the presence of God, resting in the presence of God and knowing who you are, which is not the tournament you won. It is not the position you were on the golf team. It is instead, this I am, that is inside of you. It is the light.

And there's something about that second arc, which is a letting go of all of the achievements and all of the things that you were sometimes because you wanted to do it in sometimes because life is doing it for you. But as you do that, you will find a new grace emerges, a new light, a luminous presence emerges, which allows many of the rest of us to see more of the world in the sense of being conscious of more of what is. I think about this when I see those two pictures, that picture of the confident college golfer and that picture of this priest and his wife. One arc of energy that necessarily must fall and another arc of inner presence that rises and never falls.

I ask you to take a moment and think about somebody that you know, and either you loved them or somebody you know has loved them, who has died in the last year. Think about when it might have been in their life that you saw in them some characteristic we normally associate with God giving of themselves, an altruistic care for others. That moment when you unexpectedly learned that they had done something to help somebody else years ago, that you never even knew because they would never tell you. Maybe it's a sense of humor. Maybe it's even a wrestling with the challenges of life. Maybe it's even related to an addiction or tragic circumstances. There is an all of us, I think, that second arc, there is this energy of God that is there and access by all of us, or at least most of us, at some point.

And as you envision that spark, that moment of luminous energy, you are, I think, relating to the presence of God in that person. That's the cue that they too are children of God. This is important, of course, for two reasons. One, we are here mourning the loss of someone that, when you find that moment of luminous energy you know that they are connected to God and that that is the hold God has on them. That is the journey that they are pursuing as they grow closer and closer to God, even after death. But you also know that they've given you a gift. They have revealed the presence of God to you in some very unique way. And when you take the time, as you are today, to recover that gift, to think about that moment, you will, I believe, find that presence more deeply in yourself. They have shown us the way in their own unique way.

And as we remember them, we remember that revelation of the divine presence that they have given us as a gift. And as we live into it, we will live into the presence of God knowing that as we do so we too will begin to radiate this luminous energy because there's somebody else who's coming after us. We remember those who came before, we take that life experience and integrated as best we can. And then we hope we have left some revelation of that presence for those who come after.

Blessed are those who are pure in heart for they shall see God. Happy are those who are pure of heart for they shall see God. To be pure of heart is to focus more and more on that light. And as you focus more and more on that light, it will in fact, move from you out into the world for all to see. As you focus more on that light, you will see the face of God and you will in fact, through walking in the world and caring for others and giving yourself to others, provide the light that they will need to see the face of God as well.

Happy are those who are pure in heart for they shall see God. Amen.