

Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

(Ps 146:6-10)

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Overview of the Gospel:

- This week's Gospel reading looks to the beginning of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount at a series of sayings known as "the Beatitudes." As we learned a few weeks ago, Matthew's gospel brings out many of the parallels between the life of Moses and that of Jesus. Here we see that, just as Moses ascended Mt Sinai to deliver the Jewish Law to Israel (Exodus 19), Jesus delivers the laws of his Kingdom from the Mount of the Beatitudes.
- Although the word "blessed" is sometimes translated as "happy," here it actually denotes righteousness before God: forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-2), faith (Psalm 2:12; John 20:29), and obedience to God (Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Psalm 1:1; 119:1).
- The Beatitudes describe the model of love for the Kingdom of God; a kingdom that is already in our midst (Luke 11:20), but not yet completed (Luke 11:2). This model is completely contrary to the wisdom of the world (1 Corinthians 1:17-31).
- If we read the Beatitudes carefully, we see that each one builds upon the other with the first ("Blessed are the poor in spirit") being the foundation of all.

Questions:

- In the first part of the 1st Reading, who—or what sort of people—is the prophet addressing? What is he calling them to do? Who is the Lord addressing in the second part, and how does he describe them? Do I meet this description right now? How can I more aspire to conform to this calling?
- How well do you identify with those whose calling is described by St. Paul in the 2nd Reading? How does it make you feel: Insulted? Humble? Overqualified? Underqualified? How does this calling work itself out in practical Christian piety toward God and charity toward our brothers and sisters in the Lord?
- In the Gospel Reading, how do the eight qualities that describe the "blessed" relate to the promise that follow them? How do they relate to one another? How would you describe the opposite of each quality? Who would you call "blessed" in today's world?
- Is Jesus *describing* who his followers *are*? Or *prescribing* what they must *do*? Why do you think so? How is Jesus' kingdom already, but not yet?
- What does it mean to be "poor in spirit? Name a person (famous or not) who exemplifies "poverty of spirit" and humility.
- Of these eight qualities, which two do you desire most in your life? Why? Which of these are you tempted to avoid?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1716--1729

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

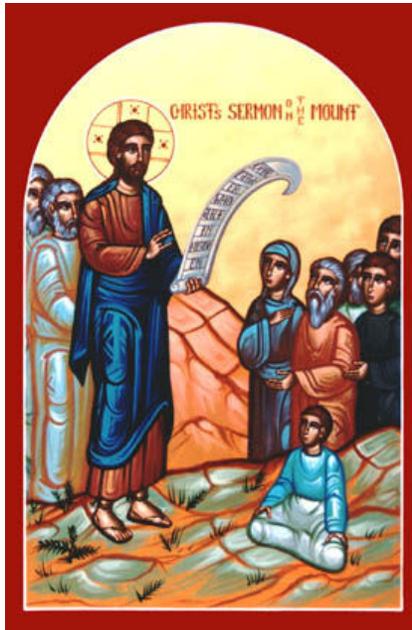
Holiness is not a matter of any one particular method of spirituality. It is a disposition of the heart that makes us small and humble within the arms of God, aware of our weakness, but almost rashly confident in his Fatherly goodness. –St. Thérèse of Lisieux

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven"

Scripture: *Matthew 5:1-12a*

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven

Meditation: What is the good life which God intends for us? And how is it related with the ultimate end or purpose of life? Is it not our desire and longing for true *happiness*, which is none other than the complete good, the sum of all goods, leaving nothing more to be desired? Jesus addresses this question in his sermon on the mount. The heart of Jesus' message is that we can live a very happy life. The call to holiness, to be saints who joyfully pursue God's will for their lives, can be found in these eight beatitudes. Jesus' beatitudes sum up our calling or vocation – to live a life of the



beatitudes. The word *beatitude* literally means "happiness" or "blessedness".

What is the significance of Jesus' beatitudes, and why are they so central to his teaching? The beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness that God has placed in every heart. They teach us the final end to which God calls us, namely the coming of God's kingdom (Matthew 4:17), the vision of God (Matthew 5:8; 1 John 2:1), entering into the joy of the Lord (Matthew 25:21-23) and into his rest (Hebrews 4:7-11). Jesus' beatitudes also confront us with decisive choices concerning the life we pursue here on earth and the use we make of the goods he puts at our disposal. God alone satisfies. Theresa of Avila's prayer book contained a bookmark which she wrote: *"Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; All things pass: God never changes. Patience achieves all it strives for.*

*Whoever has God lacks nothing, God alone suffices." Is God enough for you? God offers us the greatest good possible – abundant life in Jesus Christ (John 10:10) and the promise of unending joy and happiness with God. Do you seek the *highest good*, the total good, which is above all else?*

The beatitudes which Jesus offers us are a sign of contradiction to the world's understanding of happiness and joy. How can one possibly find happiness in poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution? Poverty of spirit finds ample room and joy in possessing God as the greatest treasure possible. Hunger of the spirit seeks nourishment and strength in God's word and Spirit. Sorrow and mourning over wasted life and sin leads to joyful freedom from the burden of guilt and spiritual oppression. God reveals to the humble of heart the true source of abundant life and happiness. Jesus promises his disciples that the joys of heaven will more than compensate for the troubles and hardships they can expect in this world. Thomas Aquinas said: *"No one can live without joy. That is why a person deprived of spiritual joy goes after carnal pleasures."* Do you know the happiness of hungering and thirsting for God alone?

"Lord Jesus, increase my hunger for you and show me the way that leads to everlasting peace and happiness. May I desire you above all else and find perfect joy in doing your will."

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