

Homily on the Beatitudes
1/29/17
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Today we heard the Sermon on the Mount, as we have many times. It has been said that the Sermon on the Mount is a summary of all Christian doctrine and the Beatitudes are a summary of the of the Sermon on the Mount.

When terms are translated from Aramaic or Greek into English they are sometimes hard to understand. For example: “Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who mourn...and...Blessed are the meek.” I think it is important to understand more fully what these terms actually mean, so that we can effectively implement them. A good commentary, the Catechism of the Catholic Church or a Catholic Study Bible, like the one published by Ignatius Press, can help with that.

“Poor in spirit” sounds like someone with a weak disposition, but that is untrue. “Poor in spirit” refers to those who recognize their need for God and His grace. They are detached from this world. They find their security in the Lord and rely on His mercy rather than their own merits or material wealth.

“Those who mourn” are not people who are crying because they are sad due to some misfortune or difficulty. Those who mourn are people who lament the current state of this life. They are those who cry because of sins and who weep for those who are persecuted because of their faith.

The “meek” -- sound like people who are weak and easily exploitable. The reality is that Jesus is indicating that those who appear powerless and insignificant in the eyes of the world, are actually far from being weak. He is referring to those who possess an

inner strength to restrain anger and discouragement in the midst of adversity. We have a number of people in this parish who exhibit the trait of meekness.

Those who hunger and thirst for holiness--are those who yearn to live rightly according to the Will of God.

The merciful are those who imitate the Father's mercy, who extend forgiveness to others, who are patient, understanding, and willing to bear with others' faults, and they are generous in aiding the needy by works of charity and compassion.

The pure of heart are those who act with integrity and serve the Lord unselfishly.

The Peacemakers are not only those who sow peace in the world but, moreover, are those who share the Gospel so that others can reconcile with God and live in peace with God.

Those who are persecuted – is obvious. They are those who are slandered, abused, hated or oppressed for their public witness to Christ and His Church.

The Beatitudes express the essence of the Gospel. As a side note, it is interesting that, under the Old Covenant, Moses brought the 10 Commandments down the mountain from God and gave them to the people, whereas, with the Beatitudes, and the new covenant, the people went up went up the mountain to God to receive them.

The difference between the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes is that the 10 Commandments are basic rules of morality, but the Beatitudes are a calling to go beyond the Commandments.

The morality of the Ten Commandments is a morality that can be measured: it is possible to say exactly where you are with them, noting the ones you broke and the degree of the breach.

When I was a young man, I remember a friend of mine asking a priest: “What is an appropriate level of intimacy before marriage? How far can one go before behaviour becomes sinful?” The priest laughed. Yes, he laughed. He told my friend that he was not approaching the subject with the right frame of mind. He said that love is always ordered toward the heavenly good of another. It is less about rules, and more about desiring what God desires. He then asked my friend if he understood what love really means and he said he thought so. The priest then quoted from Saint Augustine: He said okay: “Love, and do what you will.” Now, don’t misunderstand too quickly! This doesn’t mean license to do what one wants. It means license to do what one ought! It means that we are always to order our actions to God’s will. If you truly love, then you will not act contrary to the will of God. If we live the Beatitudes, we can do what we will and not sin, because our actions are always ordered to heavenly good and God’s will.

The morality of the Beatitudes is harder to quantify than the Commandments: how poor in spirit am I? How meek, gentle, merciful...? I can never say: I’ve reached it! I can never be self-righteous. And I can never even begin to think that I am better than another. Why? Because I can't compare. Remember, “...no human being can boast before God.”

Our reaching the fullness of life with the saints does not happen automatically. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

How do we live a life of doing the will of our heavenly Father? The answer is given us in today's gospel, the Beatitudes, where Jesus gives his followers a road map to a happy eternity. All of the saints walked the hard and narrow path of the Beatitudes.

The church invites us and challenges us to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

The Beatitudes propose to us a way of life, inviting us to identify with the poor, the meek, those who mourn, and those who hunger and thirst after justice. They challenge us to be compassionate people, to be men and women who are pure in heart, to be men and women who enable people to make their own peace with God, even when this approach to things exposes us to ridicule and persecution.

None of the saints had it as their aim in life to secure wealth, to acquire power or to gain popularity. Rather they looked forward to the eternal reward which God gives to His faithful ones at the end of this short earthly life. That is what we should be desirous of as well.

Today we are invited to walk that hard and narrow road of the Beatitudes. We need faith and courage to walk it.

St Augustine found it hard to live the Beatitudes, but when he read the lives of the saints he said, "What these ordinary women and men have done, why not me?" Why not? Faith assures us all who heed the call of Jesus and live the life of the Beatitudes that at the end of life we shall, together with all the saints, hear the consoling words of the Lord, "...Come blessed of my Father."