

Reflection for the 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time

On this Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time our Gospel Reading is taken from the Gospel of Luke, and this reading is often called "*The Sermon on the Plain*." We hear in this reading that as Jesus is coming down from the mountain with His twelve Apostles, He stops on a level area and gives what is known as "*The Sermon on the Plain*" this Sermon contains the Beatitudes, which are four solemn blessings or benedictions. These four blessings or benedictions are also found in the Gospel of Matthew in what is called "*The Sermon on the Mount*." This sermon in the Gospel of Matthew also includes four additional blessings or benedictions that are not included in the "*The Sermon on the Plain*."

It has been common for most Biblical Scholars to see "*The Sermon on the Mount*" and "*The Sermon on the Plain*" as the same sermon. Recently some Biblical Scholars have suggested that these two accounts are not of the same event but are of two different events for not only is the account in the Gospel Luke half the length of the one found in the Gospel of Matthew, but the record of who is gathered to hear the sermon is different. In the Gospel of Matthew, the author of the Gospel points out that the crowd that is gathered is from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. St. Luke in his Gospel mentions that the crowd is from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon.

It would be natural to wonder what difference does it make if "*The Sermon on the Plain*" and "*The Sermon on the Mount*" are the same sermon or two different sermons? If they are two different sermons it would indicate that Jesus mentioned the Beatitudes twice and that He felt it was important to share the Beatitudes with a large and diverse group of people. On the other hand, if "*The Sermon on the Mount*" and "*The Sermon on the Plain*" are the same sermon then we see the early Church having a focus on the Beatitudes to a point that it was something that St. Matthew and St. Luke both felt was important enough to include in their Gospels. It is important to note that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were both written around the same time, between 60 AD and 70 AD. The Gospel of Mark was written at least 10 years before these two Gospels. The Gospel of John was not written around 90 AD to 100 AD. St. Matthew and St. Luke would have known about the Gospel of Mark, but it is possible that they did not know that each other were also writing a Gospel. St. Luke in his prologue to his Gospel clearly indicates that he was aware of more individuals than just St. Mark writing a Gospel. It is very possible that St. Luke knew of St. Matthew's efforts, even if he had not seen his finished work.

What we might want to focus on at this point, is the four benedictions that are in our Gospel Reading this Sunday and are found among the eight benedictions in the Gospel of Matthew. The four benedictions found in the Gospel of Luke, focus on the poor, hungry, weeping, and the persecuted. The Gospel of Matthew has these four benedictions, but it also includes benedictions to the meek, merciful, pure of heart, and peacemakers. The first four benedictions that are found both in today's Gospel and in the Gospel of Matthew are afflictions. The four benedictions that are found in the Gospel of Matthew and not in our Gospel Reading this Sunday are attributes that can be aspired too.

The four benedictions that we have this Sunday found in "*The Sermon on the Plain*" speak of challenges that a person can face in this world. These are not challenges that only followers of Jesus Christ face, rather these are challenges that humanity can encounter living in this world. It is possible that we will all face poverty in some way be it spiritual, physical, or psychological, the same could be said for hunger, sorrow, and persecution. Jesus in "*The Sermon on the Plain*" points out the challenges that all humanity faces in this world, but He also points out there are blessings that come from walking with Jesus Christ through these challenges.

Reflecting on the fact that our Gospel Reading this Sunday only speaks of the challenges that one can face in this world and not the blessings, which are found in the Gospel of Matthew there is a difference between these two Gospel Readings that should be explored. Before "*The Sermon on the Plain*" in the Gospel of Luke, we hear of Jesus going up the Mountain to pray, then the next day calling His disciples and from them choosing the twelve Apostles. After the calling forth of the Apostles, they then arrive at a level place and Jesus gives "*The Sermon on the Plain*." In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear of Jesus calling His first disciples along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus then ministers to the great multitude and goes up the Mountain with His disciples. It is while He is on the Mountain that He gives His Sermon. In the Gospel of Mathew, the naming of the 12 Apostles happens after "*The Sermon on the Mount*."

So, in the Gospel of Luke, we have Jesus calling forth and naming the Twelve Apostles on the Mountain, they then leave the Mountain, and it is on the level ground that Jesus shares with the people the challenges they will face. While Jesus is with the people where they live and work, He shares with them the challenges of daily life. He goes on to mention how these challenges can be a blessing. In closing we can see "*The Sermon on the Plain*," meeting people where they are at, and "*The Sermon on the Mountain*" having a more of an aspirational message.