

"Be glad and rejoice, for your reward in heaven is great."

Gospel of St. Matthew (5:3-10) - The Beatitudes

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The highest priority of our lives must be in the seeking of God's kingdom. Membership in God's people cannot be obtained by the fulfillment of mere legal requirements, but through the honor of humble and self-giving service.

In today's Gospel, Jesus provides us with a vision of heaven and a basis for the Final Judgment. The Beatitudes identify, not vaguely defined, shadowy, wishy-washy people who stroll through life as self-seekers and self-indulgers who proclaim convenient and controversial moral values. No, no on the contrary. The Beatitudes identify people who are the givers of this world, people with strong, hard personalities and profiles. For humility requires great courage and great strength. The strength to be a merciful people. The strength to be a gentle people. The strength of honest and decent people, who love peace and work diligently to this end. The strength of people who have a passion for justice. The strength of people, called to action, because of inequality and iniquity. The strength of people who truly love, not only what God is, but how God acts and who imitate God's love for neighbor and enemy alike.

The Beatitudes also identify the victims of this world; the poor people, the suffering people, the weak people whose poverty imposes habitual servitude. All are God's people; these who have received, as a gift of God's grace, all that they have, little as it may be. By this world's standards they are the poor; the bereaved, the despised and the persecuted. But in the age to come they are Christ's own, who in one way or another, have confessed Him before men, who in one way or another, bear the marks of the crucified Lord, who in one way or another, have the courage to forebear and the strength to forgive mankind's indifferences to them.

For Jesus, the standard of moral behavior, is not legalism. It is not abstract ethical principles, but it is the gracious acts of mankind

toward mankind. It is service one to the other. Jesus came not to receive service, but to give service; to be part of that human poverty, and to be part of that human servitude. Jesus is not just the teacher of the Beatitudes, He is the example and the role model of the Beatitudes. And these human virtues reach their ultimate expression as Jesus hangs upon the cross.

For Jesus is poor; without power.

He is gentle and harms no one.

He is mourning for His people Israel.

He is pure of heart, as He accepts the Father's will.

He is forgiving to the thief who repented.

He is the persecuted one, the suffering one, as He hangs between heaven and earth, because He hungered and thirsted for righteousness.

He is the one, struck down for our faults and sins, yet He is merciful to me as He dies.

Dare we call ourselves Christian and expect another road to heaven than that which Jesus himself traveled? Let anyone come into today's society and say, "Blessed are the clean hearted" and he will be crucified. Let anyone come into our atomic world and say, "Blessed are the meek" and he will be ridiculed. Let anyone come into a world that seeks pleasure and say, "Blessed are they who suffer persecution" and he will be crowned with thorns. The Beatitudes are at odds with the world; and the true followers of Christ were meant to be at odds with the world. The pure of heart will be laughed at. The meek will be scorned. The humble will be walked on. The liberal will be called reactionary and the reactionary, liberal.

The Beatitudes were meant to lift us up into another world, a supernatural world, giving a new set of values, giving us a new way of thinking, giving us new standards of judgment, all of which are in opposition to the spirit of the world. The world with its hatred of discipline, its courtesy to the flesh, and its indifference to the truth, cannot tolerate a life of virtue, a life of charity and a life of true love.

The Beatitudes reach their ultimate perfection in the risen Jesus. The Jesus who is our example, who is our role model.

But Jesus the teacher tells us that the Beatitudes are about the many, about the ordinary, about the ones who have made the startling discovery that God knows more than we do. The Beatitudes are:

Christians who keep Christ.

Religion with a creed.

Meditation with sacrifice.

Family life with moral responsibility.

Sex with purity.

Economics with ethics.

Acknowledgement of our sinfulness without excuses or conditions.

The Beatitudes are also those who have the strength to forebear. Those who have the courage to forgive. Those who have the charity to share. Those who have the wisdom to be just. And Jesus did not exhaust the list of virtues when He named only eight in His sermon. Would we, you and I, not also want to see in heaven: this one for his sense of humor, that one for her kindness, another for their patience. The good Samaritan who gets involved. The father who sets a good example. The mother who seeks God's ways. The child who avoids language that betrays his integrity. Imagine if you will, all these wonderful people gathered in one room, together. It would be a gathering of total generosity. And to their delight they would find in each other, the love of the people they championed on earth. Here there would be nothing abrasive, only wonderful and delicious unity and gratitude. A gathering of the victorious. These are the virtues of real men and women, God's people. And these are the virtues that are our passport to the Kingdom of God. One of the paradoxes of Christianity is that the only thing that belongs to us when we die is that which we give away in Jesus' name. For only our earthly works follow us. It is not what is given, that profits our salvation; it is why it is given.

My friends, I urge you to reread today's gospel. View it as a blueprint for a successful life. See in it a vision of our heavenly home. Blessed are they who hear the word of God and act on it. Peace be with you.

*"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was set down, his disciples came unto him. And opening his mouth he taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart: they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: Be glad and rejoice for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you."*