

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

In the Gospel today, Jesus begins His “Sermon on the Mount: with the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes (which comes from the word that means “Blessed”) turn upside-down the values of the world. “Blessed are they who mourn” seems all wrong from a worldly perspective, since I usually don’t feel happy or blessed when I’m mourning! Yet, Jesus invites us to look at life from a Heavenly perspective. A quick overview of the Beatitudes:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” One commentator translates this “How fortunate those who beg for their life’s very breath!” (*Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word* Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis). How happy you are if you do not delude yourself in to thinking that you are self-sufficient, but realize you cannot do anything lasting on your own. How happy you are when you rely totally and explicitly and constantly on God, since He is the One who provides for all. By your dependence on God – and not on your own power, wisdom, merits or good works – you will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” How happy, how fortunate are they who are not so self-engrossed that they cannot feel and express sorrow at the death of someone. To love is to will the good of the other, without looking at what *I* receive. When death happens, blessed are those who have loved enough, have gone beyond themselves enough, that they feel the loss. Jesus says that they, and only they, will be comforted – God Himself enters our pain and suffering, God Himself wipes away the tears from our eyes (Isaiah 25:8).

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.” Meekness in this context doesn’t mean a contented passivity, but an openness, a disposition of goodwill ready to build up and recreate each situation. This means that I am not simply a doormat for people, but I don’t fight violence with violence. Rather, we return a blessing when we are cursed, prayers and love when we are reviled and hated. In recognizing that God’s Hand and Will can be in each and every situation, we become true heirs, for we are ready to welcome everything as *gift*.

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” Righteousness or justice means *holiness*. Holiness is not an ethereal concept, but the concrete work of conforming our mind and actions to God’s Will, God’s Mind and Heart. To hunger and thirst for holiness means to *long for* God’s Will, His Justice to be done in this world. If this is the deepest longing of our hearts, we will be satisfied by God Himself!

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” As we have just finished the Year of Mercy, and are still working on our “Million Acts of Mercy,” we recognize God’s presence in mercy – His other name is “Mercy”! Jesus says we receive mercy *if and only if* we are merciful. May we grow in mercy!

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.” To be clean or pure of heart is to be focused on the “one thing necessary”. When our only desire is to seek God, then we see Him in each circumstance and situation. All things are pure for those who are pure.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Remember that God’s peace is not simply an absence of conflict or violence. This is the best peace the world can give. No, God’s peace goes deeper than a “negative” – a lack of violence. God’s peace is “positive” which brings wholeness. Those who actively work to bring this *wholeness* to others and the world are children of God – they are *like God*.

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” A hard saying. Those who are persecuted for holiness are truly happy, fortunate, blessed. Have you ever had this happen, that people look at you funny because of the ashes on your forehead on Ash Wednesday, or stare at you because you make the sign of the cross and pray grace before meals at a restaurant, or when you don’t “fall in line” with the culture as they redefine marriage and sexuality? Jesus says, in this persecution, you are in the Kingdom (an “already, not yet” reality).

Finally, **“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”** Jesus now redirects the Beatitudes from a general “they” to a specific “you”. To follow Him means not if but *when* they insult *you* and persecute *you*, and speak false evils against *you* because of Him. We have seen this in the history of Christianity, and will continue to see it. Jesus says, “REJOICE!” Our reward is coming. Don’t get discouraged, but continue to follow closely! IT WILL BE WORTH THE PERSECUTION!