

The Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 29, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“Christ Jesus embodies, incarnates, is the Beatitudes...When he preaches the Beatitudes, Christ is providing an intimate commentary on who he himself is, and the disciples are to be fortunate and blessed in this precise way in which the Son of God is fortunate and blessed.”
(Father Simeon taken from the Magnificat - January 2023)

It would perhaps be most difficult to argue that the Sermon on the Mount is not the most famous of Christ's sermons. I believe most, if not all, biblical experts would agree that it is the most famous and perhaps one of the most important, if not the most important of Christ's sermons. The beauty and significance of the words He spoke seem to have deep and important meaning. And, I have to admit, I have not always understood all that Christ was saying. Further, I will not say that I can convey all the meaning from this gospel reading. However, I will make effort to share with you, in brief summary, what little I have gleaned over time and bolstered with even more reading in recent weeks.

To make a point: In your bulletin, you will see I have quoted Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, a Cistercian monk (Father Simeon). Father Simeon has written a four-volume commentary on Matthew's Gospel (complete works). Other well-known biblical scholars, such as William Barclay, Alfred McBride and Bishop Robert Barron to name just a few, have said much about the Sermon on the Mount. My point is simply this: We frequently need scholars to help us understand the things Jesus spoke about. They have helped me considerably.

With all that said, did the first couple of sentences of today's gospel seem to be important to you? That's a rhetorical question. I believe it is. Do you recall Moses going up onto a mountain and later returning with tablets inscribed with God's law? In today's gospel, Jesus goes up a mountain and is followed by his disciples. Metaphorically speaking, there's a suggestion here that Jesus was like Moses, however, instead of receiving laws from God, Jesus, with authority, gives laws. You may recall, at one point in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ makes reference to the Torah. He says essentially, you have heard it said – and then, Jesus says ...”But I say...” This reveals that Christ has authority over the sacred Torah which the Jewish people held as sacred law! Jesus presents as the new Moses and more. And, in those first sentences of this gospel, Christ sits down and begins to teach his disciples. Jesus begins one of the important steps to fulfill his mission on earth. He knows he will require the help of his apostles and followers to continue God's plan. He is, at this point (in sports talk), providing the play book. He was teaching his disciples the message they would need to convey to the rest of the world. He was filling them with the good news to be carried to all peoples.

This message from Christ is conveyed in the Beatitudes. Taken from Latin, beatitudes means blessedness or happiness (may also be interpreted as “lucky”) and this message is a glorious happy message for mankind. Although, unfortunately, there would be many who would not listen or pay heed.

For the sake of brevity and limited time, I will not attempt to fully summarize the meaning, as I understand them, of each of the Beatitudes. If you will allow me, I will touch on a couple of the first Beatitudes mentioned.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Christ is talking about man’s greatest desire to be close to God. The poor in spirit desire no earthly things that are just a momentary flash in our lives. Physical pleasure, material things, riches, power – all earthly things are merely passing elements in our lives. Those seeking God, richness in spirit, are moving toward the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Our world is full of pain, sadness, disappointment, tragedy and failure as well as laughter, fun, victories, and the best of times. Allowing both sides of the spectrum in our lives suggests that we will be able to suffer the pains required to serve our God. Freedom of “just the best of times” allows us the flexibility (like the reed that bends but doesn’t break) to survive life’s demands. Further, it is our duty to provide hope and understanding to those who are suffering.

If you will, allow me a last word about the Sermon on the Mount. I happen to see a painting from 1896 by a Hungarian painter by the name of Karoly Ferenczy. He offered a modern interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount in which the scene provided people from many times/eras. The setting was a European hillside. People were wearing clothes of that time and others. A knight in armor is pictured next to Christ. It says something powerful about the teachings of Christ. Karoly expresses his view that Christ’s words transcend time. Further, as the knight in armor drives home the point, Christ’s teachings were for all peoples and all time. His words stand out from all the words of all men throughout time because His words are God’s words. He is God and His words are not just for people in the past, God’s message is just as significant for us, here and now.

Mother Teresa advised us so well when she said, “Let nothing come between you and Jesus.”

Let nothing come between you and God’s love. Peace be with you.