



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
January 29, 2023

The Beautiful Beatitudes

By Mark Haydu, LC

To follow Christ is to seek lowliness, humility, mercy, and righteousness. The Ten Commandments summarize God’s teaching to his people. Jesus gives us a new law that builds on the old. Before it was “You shall not...”; now it is, “Blessed are you when...” He calls us to greater happiness, greater blessing, but it comes with a challenge. Saint Augustine says that Jesus went up the mountain to preach the Beatitudes because he was preaching a higher moral doctrine: “greater precepts of righteousness.”

The new law contradicts what our wounded human nature tends to think and feel. We are challenged to believe blessings can come from tears, meekness,

and poverty; that living meekly leads to strength and security. Appreciating these truths requires transforming our minds and hearts. Faith is required. Deeply desiring and living in the right does bring satisfaction. There is consolation in mourning the things that sadden Christ’s heart.

If we live by the Beatitudes, many will treat us more generously. We know people who are merciful, and we are quick to show them mercy. When our hearts are clean, we can see God more clearly. Those who seek and create peace are considered by all to be children of God. They are not without trials and suffering, but they are blessed and happy.

Christ calls us to store up treasures in heaven, spiritual blessings that cannot be taken away. Even if we experience difficulty, we will still receive the highest and greatest gift: the kingdom of heaven. +

A Word from Pope Francis

What does...*blessed* mean? The original term does not mean one with a full belly... but rather it is a person who is in a condition of grace, who progresses in God’s grace and progresses on God’s path: patience, poverty, service to others, comfort...Those who advance in these things are happy and shall be blessed.

General Audience, January 29, 2020



Sunday Readings

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12–13

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, / who have observed his law; / Seek justice, seek humility.

1 Corinthians 1:26–31

God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong.

Matthew 5:1–12a

[Jesus said,] “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus gives us a new law that builds on the old. Before it was “You shall not...”; now it is, “Blessed are you when....”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I really believe the messages of the Beatitudes?
- How does believing the Beatitudes make a difference in how I live?

Softening Christianity

By Fr. John F. Kavanaugh, SJ

If we are to judge by the Sermon on the Mount, even Jesus, who is God with us, has a view of human affairs thoroughly at odds with our own. If we have to tune out the prophets' mistrust of humankind, imagine the skills of repression we must employ to ignore Christ's rejection of our every human impulse.

The benighted Nietzsche was clever enough to see the terrible truth in the Sermon on the Mount. What Jesus proposes is a bald reversal of human nature. Nietzsche knew that every last one of us wants wealth abounding and a full stomach. We dread suffering and tears. Being hated, ostracized, and insulted by others is among our greatest nightmares.

But Jesus deemed such conditions blessed. We are to rejoice if we are poor and hungry. We are to take delight in our tears and accept gladly our rejection by the powers of the age. This outright rejection of natural wisdom and desire so infuriated Nietzsche that he raged at those who might dare to follow Christ.

Perhaps the most constant failure of Christians is our reluctance to take our own gospels seriously and accept them in their entirety. We have an uncanny ability to block out those portions of Scripture that challenge our prejudices and to magnify those that confirm our own advantage.

A question much ignored these days is whether our faith has anything to do with justice, economics, poverty, or other



sociopolitical issues. We have pried open a yawning gap between the world of faith and the world of "real" issues. As a result, we never have to worry about changing our behavior or confronting our culture. This is quite strange for a people that contends that its way is the way of the Lord Jesus.

Nietzsche realized that there is something in Christianity dreadfully at odds with our natural impulse. He would never settle for some watered-down, feel-good Jesus who pals along with us in our strutting.

Unfortunately, Christians have done just that. Rather than rejecting outright Christ's teachings, we soften and suffocate them with the pillows of our more realistic wisdom. As the great

English writer and theologian Dorothy Sayers observed, we have snared the lion of Judah, trimmed his claws, and turned him into a domesticated kitten. +

Excerpted from *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter* by John F. Kavanaugh, SJ. Visit Liguori.org to learn more and review our list of *Daybreaks* authors, including Fr. Ron Rolheiser, Sr. Dianne Bergant, Fr. Daniel Horan, and others.

Henri Nouwen writes: Jean Vanier, who founded a worldwide network of communities for mentally disabled people, [said] Jesus did not say, "Blessed are those who care for the poor," but "Blessed *are* the poor." As simple as this remark may seem, it offers the key to the kingdom. I asked Vanier: "How do you find the strength to see so many people each day and listen to their many problems and pains?" He smiled and said: "They show me Jesus and give me life." Here lies the...mystery of Christian service: those who serve Jesus in the poor will be fed by him whom they serve. +

Excerpted from *Henri Nouwen: In My Own Words*, © 2001 Liguori Publications, 825170.


PRAYER

Gracious God, you who have blessed us so richly, please give us the grace to be a blessing to others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 30—February 4

Monday, Weekday:
Heb 11:32–40 / Mk 5:1–20


Tuesday, St. John Bosco:
Heb 12:1–4 / Mk 5:21–43

Wednesday, Weekday:
Heb 12:4–7, 11–15 / Mk 6:1–6

Thursday, Presentation of the Lord: Mal 3:1–4 / Heb 2:14–18 / Lk 2:22–40 or 2:22–32

Friday, Weekday:
Heb 13:1–8 / Mk 6:14–29

Saturday, Weekday:
Heb 13:15–17, 20–21 / Mk 6:30–34

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