

40a, 17

1. Today's gospel is about what makes us blessed (or loved) in god's eyes; the gospel gives our life meaning and importance in the sight of God.

We all know people who have lots of money, prestigious jobs, tons of education and yet who still don't feel blessed or loved. This is not to say that those who are broke, unemployed, have dropped out of school are necessarily on top of the world. And so the question remains: what does it take to make me feel blessed, loved by God? Intellectually and by faith, we know that we're loved by God, but that is quite different than feeling His love, His blessings.

Our faith tells us that God loves us no matter what, but that doesn't seem to be enough—we still need to feel that we are blessed, that we are loved. We have to feel our own acceptance by God. And I think a key to this happening is if we focus on the 8 beatitudes found in Matthew's gospel.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus sets out the charter of Christian living; it is through following Jesus that we can finally get it; get that we're accepted for who we are; loved for who we are.

2. The beatitudes—these attitudes in being—are sometimes said to be the Christian equivalent to the 10 Commandments, but they are so much more. What separates them from the 10 Commandments is not only their CONTENT, but the MANNER in which we are called to the ultimate commitment.

The 10 Commandments are, as the name implies, commanded of us; they are a do or die covenant filled with “thou shall nots.”

But the beatitudes—these attitudes in be-ing—are a new expression in our faith that are a set of rules that are not really rules; there are no “shall nots,” no ultimatums, only a path that brightens our lives with a renewed faith, renewed hope and renewed love.

Actually, there are 80 beatitudes spread out through both the Old and New Testament, but here Jesus speaks of only 8 of them. And since they were important to him, they must be important to us.

But before we get into a theological explanation of the beatitudes, let's use our imaginations; let's imagine that Jesus takes a seat in your living room and begins to talk with you:

Jesus begins by saying: If you're struggling to pay the bills, but insist on making time to be with your children whenever they need you, blessed are you—you may never own the big vacation home, or a Jaguar, but heaven will be yours...

If you are overwhelmed by the care of a dying spouse, a sick child or an elderly parent, but you are determined to make a loving home for them, blessed are you—one day your life will be without worries or concerns...

If you willingly give your time to helping out in soup kitchens; or helping kids to learn how to read; teach in a Catholic schools or the religious education program; if you befriend the uncool, the unpopular, the perpetually lost, blessed are you—count God among your friends and biggest boosters...

If you refuse to take shortcuts when it comes to doing what is right, if you refuse to compromise your integrity and ethics, if you refuse to take refuge in the rationalization that "everybody does it," blessed are you—you will triumph in the end...

If you try to understand things from the perspective of the other person and always manage to find a way to make things work for the good; if you're feeling discouraged and frustrated because you are always paying a high price for trying to love the unlovable and forgiving the undeserving, blessed are you—God will welcome you...

If you struggle to discover what God asks of you in all things; if your constant prayer is not “give me more,” but “ help me,“ then blessed are you—God will always be there for you...

If you readily spend time listening and consoling anyone who looks to you for support, for guidance, for compassion; if you manage to heal wounds and build bridges; if you can see the good and potential good that God sees in everyone and seek the good for even those who are unkind to you, blessed are you—you are nothing less than God’s own beloved...

And finally, Jesus states: if you are rejected or demeaned because of the color of your skin or the sound of your name; if your faith automatically puts you at odds with some people; if you refuse to compromise in order to “get along” or “not make waves,” blessed are you—one day you will live happily with God...

3. What makes the beatitudes so astonishing is that they turn the values that we’ve learned from society-and sadly sometimes from family and friends--upside down; because Jesus is speaking of a spiritual kingdom--not a kingdom marked by self-interest—as he outlines characteristics and values that often reverse the hallmarks of the successful and worldly person

And so now let us take a theological look at the Beatitudes that we find in Matthew, chapter 5. Jesus begins the beatitudes by speaking of the POOR IN SPIRIT. This value does not refer to checking accounts or expensive toys; it is @ radical dependence upon God, the knowledge that all we own, we owe to God; such a one realizes that he is helpless & takes the next step by putting trust in God.

Kingdom people realize that nothing is ultimately possible without God’ continuing power and presence and they come before God in absolute trust.

THE MEEK. This value has nothing to do with timidity; it is mid way between recklessness & caution--perhaps hard-core gentleness is more to the point

The meek are thorough realists who have plenty of courage and daring & are always ready to learn & accept guidance from God.

THE MOURNERS. Life on earth will always be a mixture of triumph and tragedy, laughter and tears because pain and disappointment will always be with us.

For kingdom people, the point is that they never lose a sensitivity to evil and its impact, whether at a personal tragedy or deaths in Italy or Alabama.

Kingdom people will never allow you to cry alone because they will be there to lend empathy & hope.

HUNGER FOR HOLINESS. Every human heart possesses the unrestricted drive to be at one with the infinite God

St. Augustine called it a “restless heart” that would not be calm until it rests in God; the real kingdom person discovers this inner hunger planted there by God and begins to realize an excitement that is deeper than the hunt for \$, sex and power.

THE MERCIFUL. God is the supreme Master of forgiveness; it is treating others as God treats us. It is not a question of waiting for apologies and then being magnanimous; rather the forgiver is already offering reconciliation before apologies takes place; it is being understanding towards other people’s defects & then overlooking them.

THE PEACEMAKERS. In a world where violence, wars, quarrels, murders and fights are daily, there is a special need for this kind of kingdom person

A peacemaker is a gift to a family, to a community, to a nation and to our world.

THE PURE IN HEART. Kingdom people are mighty because of their integrity of heart and purity of intention—it is their capacity to love

One may argue that no motivations are ever that pure; that is probably true, but the ideal is being invoked here and this dream is drawing kingdom persons to achieve a purity of heart that comes with God's grace.

THE PERSECUTED. All great people will suffer for their principles in one way or another.

It is the substance of which martyrdom is made;
there are times when compromises are impossible and a stand must be taken.

This is not a question of futile rushing in where angels fear to tread;
it is exactly where angels boldly march;
it is the meaning of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

These beatitudes are guiding stars. Sailors cannot reach up and put stars in their pockets, but the star can lead them to their destination.

Jesus points to those who are vulnerable, powerless, broken, and suffering and says that they are the blessed ones, for these challenging experiences have helped them to acknowledge their dependence upon God. opened their lives to God.

Jesus is not calling us to be victims, but is revealing what traits of character are valued by God

The world values strength over weakness, justice over mercy, gain over loss, war-waging over Peacemaking.

Jesus proclaims as blessed those who form a new community based on the upside down spiritual values of these 8 attitudes of being.

Think of it this way: we are diamonds in the rough, diamonds that need to be polished so that our true self can be seen, not only by God, but by us as well. And here again, we are challenged to accept our own acceptance. God still loves our carbonated self, but wants us to shine brightly and for this to happen, we need to study and learn from these attitudes in being that Jesus has given us so that we can become the wonderful, dazzling diamonds that God has always intended us to be...