

Homily for 6th Sunday Year C, Feb. 13, 2022:

There are two renditions in the gospels for the Beatitudes. The most well-known is from Matthew, chapter five. Today in Luke, we get the other version.

The Beatitudes hold a special place in the hearts of the faithful. They are the gospel equivalent of the Ten Commandments in their importance. As the Ten Commandments present a blueprint for the ethical lives of God’s people; so too the Beatitudes present a blueprint for our lives in Christ.

The Beatitudes cannot be understood without reading them through the lens of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. They only make sense after one accepts that they are not logically deduced, but are given by God and reveal something about what the Kingdom of God is like.

Matthew and Luke present the Beatitudes in remarkably different ways. They are so different that it is worth spending some time looking at both of them side-by-side. Each is very challenging. Together they complement each other. In Matthew, it is easy to assume that the main point is to be gentle of mind and heart. In Luke, it more concrete. It is not about being poor “in spirit.” It is about being poor.

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The Greek word for “Beatitude” is translated in bibles as either “Blessed” or “Happy.” In Luke, there is an immediacy and an intimacy in Jesus’ words. He does not say, “Blessed are THEY.” He says, “Blessed are YOU.” Jesus’ teaching of this is personal, it is for each of us.

I once read an analysis of the Beatitudes. It suggested that the Beatitudes can be understood and part of the structure of Covenants. Often, a Covenant included a list of the advantages that resulted in keeping the Covenant. And it also listed the penalties for those who broke the Covenant. Luke remembers Our Lord attaching both “Blessings” and “Woes” to being in this covenantal relationship as His disciple.

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The Beatitudes today are hard to grasp. They come across almost as a reverse of the Hindu belief in “Karma.” But instead of suggesting a cosmic justice for virtue or vice; it simply says if you suffer now, you will benefit later - and if you enjoy now, you will suffer later. It is a shocking take on Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, where there is a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. You had better hope to be going through times of destruction now, so that later will be a time of building and healing.

It is an extreme declaration that, “The Last will be First and the First will be Last.” But it doesn’t say why.

Es una declaración extrema: "Los últimos serán los primeros y los primeros serán los últimos". Pero no dice por que.

It certainly is a follow-up to our First Reading and Psalm today. They both offer a stark choice. There are only two ways to go: Trust in men or trust in God; follow the law of the Lord or follow the path of the wicked; be a tree planted by water rather than a bush in a desert.

Which do you choose? Blessed or Woe? Life or death? The Lord or wickedness? But in the beatitudes, it is not expressed as a choice between virtue and vice, but one’s situation.

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Luke presents us with four choices between “Blesseds” or “Woes.”

The First is Poor or Rich. I don’t see myself as rich. Of course, when my paycheck is added to the house and food the parish provides, I am doing better than many others who work for the Church. And most of us live above the poverty line. And even many of those who don’t at least have a roof over their heads and food on the table. We do better than many who ask for handouts on the streets. And poverty in the United States is totally different than what vast numbers of people live like in third-world nations.

What does it mean for me to choose being poor? To really see that if I have two coats (and I have more than two) the others don’t belong to me, but to those who have none? Am I to be a person who does not have even one coat?

The Second choice is hungry or filled. Anymore, I am not even very good at abstaining, let alone fasting. I don’t think I have ever gone two days without

eating – and even then, I had plenty of clean water to drink. I am not good company if my stomach is growling. My weight witnesses to that. I used to comment that the students deserve at least one good snow-day every year. I don't anymore. I have had enough principals tell me that for some families being at school at least insures the students have a breakfast and a lunch that day.

What does it mean for me to choose being hungry? Why is being full now deserving a life of hunger later on? (We once had a parishioner who chose to fast totally from food and water for 48 hours once-a-week. She looked older than her years. But she also had a fire in her eyes and a love of God and scripture that could not be denied.) How do I choose being hungry? How do I choose to at least not be full?

The Third choice is weeping and laughing. I think I have had enough sadness, frustration, oppression, and hurt to last many lifetimes. Until I talk with the person next to me. They have not only plenty more to weep about, but do a lot more weeping. Sometimes they are also the ones who laugh the best. Didn't Christ also say he came that we might have life, and have it to the full.

What does it mean for me to choose weeping? Perhaps a bit less of self-centered weeping, and more weeping with others and for others? Sharing their burdens? Laughter seems that little bit of heaven we humans are gifted with and so much need. What does it mean to choose not to laugh now, that I might laugh later?

The last choice is also the last Beatitude in Matthew. The choice of being hated for the sake of Jesus or being well spoken of. This choice is the most obvious. Many atheists call all believers superstitious. Those who promote immorality (whether in terms of sexuality or greed or violence or prejudice) call Christians haters for understanding that proper behavior stems from respecting the very nature of the person, the object, and the activity.

How do I, without being prideful, make Christ more visible in my life? How do I refuse to “fly under the radar” so that my relationship with Jesus goes unnoticed, un-proclaimed, and un-credited. Christ, after all, is the reason for any virtue I possess.

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These are more questions than answers. The Beatitudes force us to look at how the God of Love turns our fallen world upside down. Those who would save their

life will lose it, and those who lose their life for Jesus' and the sake of the gospel will save it.

Lent is two-and-a-half weeks away. One worthwhile preparation would be to think about the Beatitudes in both Mathew chapter five and Luke chapter six. And consider what Our Lord and Savior calls us to as disciples this year, and this coming holy season. So that we may be blessed.