

HOMILY – 4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 30, 2011

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“He went up the mountain...(and) began to teach them”

Whenever I read this passage from Matthew on the Beatitudes, my mind goes back almost 10 years ago when I was on pilgrimage in the Holy Land. One of our visits was to the Mount of Beatitudes. Actually, even though Matthew has Jesus ascend a mountain to address the disciples, the countryside around Capernaum, where this event takes place, has no mountains. The “Mount of Beatitudes” is really a long sloping hillside that rolls down toward the Sea of Galilee. Since Matthew is writing mostly for a Jewish community, he provides them with an important parallel. Just as Moses received God’s commandments on a mountain, so the new “Moses,” Jesus, proclaims God’s Word from another mountain.

I have to mention another scene on the Mount of Beatitudes that is seared into my consciousness. It was a beautiful Sunday morning when we were there and we celebrated Mass around an outside altar. We stood under a canopy of trees with the warm sun streaming down through the branches onto our little group praying quietly at this sacred place. All of a sudden, at the consecration no less, a group of low flying jets screamed overhead just above the tree tops breaking into our contemplative Eucharist with a violence I will never forget. Later, as we were enjoying a noonday luncheon at the retreat house at that site, we learned that those planes were Israeli fighter jets on their way to bomb some sites in nearby Syria. *“Blessed are the peace-makers, for they will be called children of God.”* Indeed.

Jesus’ teaching on the Beatitudes is directed to those who follow him and wish to know how to establish the reign of God. His words turn our usual way of living upside-down. The type of behavior, the values that Jesus advocates are the opposite of that which is espoused by our culture. The behavior that Jesus suggests is at odds with what society claims will give us the blessings that we seek in life. The usual rungs of the ladder to success call for calculation, competition, and caring little for anyone other than oneself. Jesus is offering us ways of being in this world now that will get us into the world that is yet to come.

Being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting for God’s justice are not the usual ways that our world espouses. Showing mercy, being clean of heart, making peace, and putting up with persecution are often foreign to the attitudes that influence us. But if you really want to be seekers of the Lord as Zephaniah says,

then pray with the Beatitudes and they will reveal the blessings that are promised by living according to Jesus' values.

The Anglican clergyman and bible translator, JB Philips, wrote a small book called ***Your God is Too Small***. One of the neat things in his book is his way of presenting the beatitudes. He first starts off with **What Most People Think**. And then, in paraphrase, **What Jesus Christ Said**. It goes like this:

Happy are the pushers; for they get on in the world. (Jesus says) *Happy are those who realize their spiritual poverty: they have already entered the kingdom of Reality.*

Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them: *Happy are those who bear their share of the world's pain: in the long run they will know more happiness than those who avoid it.*

Happy are they who complain: for they get their own way in the end. *Happy are those who accept life and their own limitations: they will find more in life than anybody.*

Happy are the blasé: for they never worry over their sins. *Happy are those who long to be truly "good:" they will fully realize their ambition.*

Happy are the slave-drivers: for they get results. *Happy are those who are ready to make allowances and to forgive: they will know the love of God.*

Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world: for they know their way around. *Happy are those who are real in their thoughts and feelings: in the end they will see the ultimate Reality, God.*

Happy are the trouble-makers: for people have to take notice of them. *Happy are those who help others to live together: they will be known to be doing God's work.*

And maybe we could add to his list:

Happy are those that never stand for anything, they will always play it safe: *Happy are those who follow Jesus no matter what the cost, they will know the ultimate triumph of love.*

Listen to Jesus today. Focus on the blessings his way of living promise. You will not be disappointed. You will find life. You will find love. You will find happiness. You will find a taste of the life that is to come in the kingdom of heaven.