

Matthew 5:1 to 12 – 8.0 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit  
Amen.

Verses 1a and 2 of our reading from Matthew's gospel reads, "And after he had sat down, his disciples came to him". Then he began to speak and teach them the Beatitudes.

But before we start to look at each of the beatitudes there are two general points to be noted first.

Firstly all the beatitudes start with the word 'Blessed', and one could be forgiven for thinking that the beatitudes were statements, that one day, for example, when we are in a state of being poor in spirit we will be blessed.

But we are not to read the beatitudes as statements but as exclamations.

Jesus is saying, "O blessed are you who are poor in spirit", the beatitudes are not pious hopes of what shall be in the future, they are joyful congratulations to those who are already poor in spirit.

The blessedness, which belongs to the Christian, is not a blessedness which is postponed to some future time; it is a blessedness which exists for us here and now.

And secondly the word 'blessed' can be interpreted as, 'O the bliss of being a Christian!' or, "O the joy of following Christ!"

Jesus is saying that life in the kingdom with him is a life of profound joy and happiness.

The very form of the beatitudes is the exclamation of the joyous thrill and the radiant gladness of the Christian life, which we spoke of when looking at St Paul's letter of joy and happiness to the Philippians a few weeks ago.

The beatitudes come like a bolt out of the blue for any who thinks that religion is a sad and miserable affair.

And indeed some religions may be sad and miserable affairs, but knowing and having a relationship with Jesus is quite different, it brings joy and happiness beyond our wildest dreams.

So turning now to the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", but what does being poor in spirit mean? Simply this.

We must be humble in spirit: it refers to those who have confidence only in God.

In other words, when we come to God, we must realize our own sin, our spiritual emptiness, our spiritual poverty, and our need for God.

The Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

Pride can take all kinds of forms, but the worst is spiritual pride. Often the richer we are in material things, the greater our spiritual pride.

Have we faced our own need of Christ? Do we realize that we are sinners and need God's forgiveness? Don't let pride get in the way, but turn to Christ in humility and faith, and God will bless us and save us.

The kingdom of God is given, not to those who think they have earned a place in heaven, but to the poor in spirit who acknowledge their sinfulness and dependence on God's mercy.

Here's a short poem, its called, "Heaven's Gate",

I dreamt death came the other night,  
And Heaven's Gate swung wide  
An Angel with a halo bright  
Ushered me inside.

And, there, to my astonishment,  
Stood folks I judged and labelled;  
As quite unfit, of little worth  
And, spiritually disabled!

Indignant words rose to my lips,  
But never were set free,  
For every face showed stunned surprise;  
Not **one** expected me!

The next beatitude is, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted".

It is of course right to interpret this beatitude to mean that blessed is the person who mourns for a loved one, but its main thought undoubtedly is: Blessed are those who mourn because of their sinfulness and unworthiness.

Such a person will pray continually to God through our Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness, for strength to withstand the temptations of this world and for guidance in every day living.

And for those of us who have to pray for forgiveness everyday please remember that we are not failures but sinners.

With mourning of course comes great sorrow, but from sorrow can come great strength and a deeper understanding, here is another very short poem:

I walked a mile with Pleasure,  
She chattered all the way,  
but left me none the wiser  
for all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,  
and ne'er a word said she.  
But, oh, the things I learned from her  
when Sorrow walked with me!

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth".

The Greek word meek can also be translated as 'gentle', 'humble', 'considerate', or 'courteous', and the New English Bible uses the word 'gentle' and the Good News Bible uses the word 'Humble'.

So for a better understanding of this beatitude, we may write it as, blessed are those who are meek, gentle, humble, considerate, and courteous, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”.

But what is righteousness? Here are three aspects of righteousness; firstly it is a right relationship with God, this can only be obtained when we submit to God’s will and obey him.

To Jesus the key to living a full, creative and righteous life is to show our love for him through our obedience to his commandment, and in John’s gospel Jesus gives us a new commandment to love one another as he loves us, so we must love one another”.

Secondly its a moral relationship with God, this is achieved when our motives for doing something are to the glory of God and not to our own glory.

The third is a social righteousness, which among other things is concerned with freeing people from oppression by promoting equal rights, and equal justice, and releasing them from poverty through fair trade, and other acts of love.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”. In the Lord’s Prayer we have a similar clause; “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

Mercy is compassion for people in need, and the needful are both those with material needs and those with spiritual needs, and Jesus didn’t distinguish between the two, and it is only in satisfying the needs of others, both materially and spiritually, that our own needs begin to be satisfied.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”.

Our whole lives must be transparent before God and other people. Our very hearts including our thoughts and our motives are to be pure; we are not to be deceitful or underhand.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, one of the most frequent causes of conflict is underhandedness and deceitfulness while openness and sincerity brings true reconciliation.

One of the saddest’ situations we can get into both in our church, or elsewhere, is when something goes wrong and people stoke up the fire of discontent. If blessed are the peacemakers then cursed must be the troublemakers, because the opposite of blessed is cursed.

Now peace making is divine work, for peace means reconciliation, and God is the author of peace and reconciliation.

As St Paul wrote to the Colossians, “And through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood on the cross”.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake”. Jesus moved from peacemaking to persecution because not all

attempts at reconciliation succeed.

Some people take the initiative to revile us, not because of who we are but for righteousness sake, because they find distasteful the righteousness for which we hunger and thirst. And Jesus ends by saying “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

As we sit let us pray.

Dear Father God open our eyes that we may see you,  
incline our hearts that we may desire you,  
order our steps that we might follow the way of your  
commandments;  
we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour.

Amen