

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 29, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth, who have observed his law; seek justice, seek humility; perhaps you may be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger.

But I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD: the remnant of Israel. They shall do no wrong and speak no lies; nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue; they shall pasture and couch their flocks with none to disturb them.

Psalm: Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

R. (Matt 5:3) Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!

The LORD keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets captives free.

R. Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!

The LORD gives sight to the blind;
the LORD raises up those who were bowed down.
The LORD loves the just;
the LORD protects strangers.

R. Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!

The fatherless and the widow the LORD sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The LORD shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations.
Alleluia.

R. Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Consider your own calling, brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God. It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord."

Gospel: Matt 5:1-12a

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

In this week's Gospel, Jesus tells the Beatitudes to us. We admire especially the blessings for those who are helpers of others: peacemakers, mercy givers, seekers of fairness. We recall, for instance, Mother Teresa. But then we notice the poor, and it is hard to see why they rate so highly. Do you know? And those who grieve? How about the ones that people insult and persecute and accuse falsely? Should these folks count themselves happy and blest? It can seem that Jesus' heart is reserved especially for those who are troubled: those who grieve, who are meek, who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, who are insulted, persecuted and accused, and, again, those who are poor (Gospel).

The world and its leaders might have compiled a different list. Blest are you if you are rich or if you have never been forced to grieve for loved ones. Blest are you if you are adequate and free of enemies and well-spoken of at all times. "The good life" is what everybody wants for themselves and their friends, isn't it? But then, why did our savior go in the opposite direction; all the way to the cross? Could it be because riches and honor can be lures that lead us far from God and Jesus—and from our real selves? Try this: *Riches* tempt us to let our possessions substitute for who we really are. *Honor* tempts us to take things easy, to bask in human respect, to never ask who God created when he made the person I am, out of nothing.

Go where God's love is quietly present.

To put it simply, reputation and possessions can become a false identity. They are "out there" instead of "in here." Within each of us, "in here," is the gift of the unique, irreplaceable person that we are. Sometimes a quiet voice from within gasps out the words, "I am your real self but you have covered me over with tributes and belongings and popularity and success. You are smothering me. Help!" So do we continue acquiring? Soon we may be told to let go of our first-world achievements, as Jesus was. I love the ancient story about the wise man who was ejected from a dinner party because he was dressed in rags and tatters. He left, and returned in sumptuous, silken garments, borrowed but just right for the gathering. Of course he was well received. Then after a while someone noticed him sitting on the floor behind a potted tree, spooning food down the sleeve of his garment. The host came over, furious. "What in the world are you doing?" "Well," said the wise man, "obviously it is not me who was invited to the party but my clothes. I am letting them enjoy the dinner." God loves the "real self" within each of us instead of the clothes we wear or the esteem we achieve. God calls us to be persons who are loved and who love in return. The erratic things—what we own, what honors we receive, how filled with pride we are—these just get in the way, sometimes tragically. So, maybe every one of the beatitudes makes deep sense. Go where God's love is quietly present. Become a home for the people of this earth, helping them receive their blessing and receiving our own, as well. Be disadvantaged and then count your blessings.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Was the faithful "remnant" in this reading practicing the Beatitudes from today's Gospel ("Seek justice, seek humility")? These are not easy to acquire, but could there be something innate to human nature that allows us to receive such qualities from God?
2. How can the "weak of the world shame the strong"? What does this mean to you? Is weakness a top priority for the United States today, or is it strength? Is non-violence a weakness or is it strength?
3. Can the Beatitudes become a way of life for you? If one of them becomes important to you, might the others follow?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.