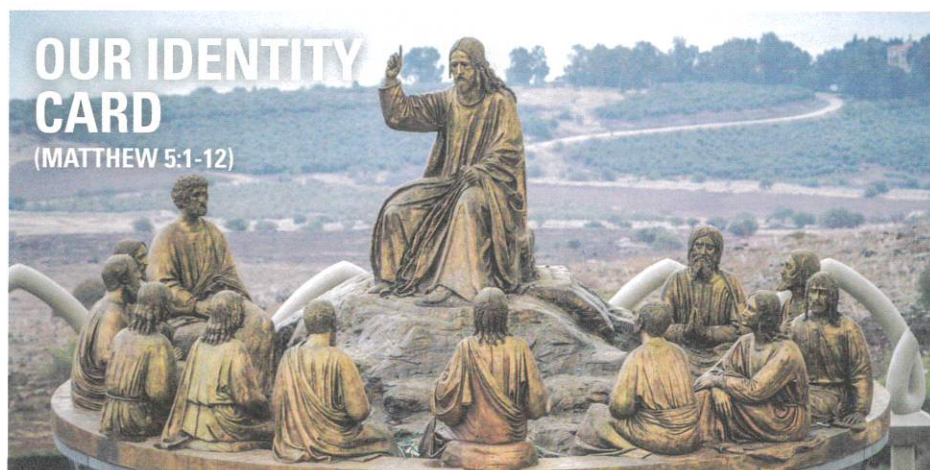


Sunday Message

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year A • 29 January 2023 • Psalter Week 4



A crowd of people follow Jesus. Searching for a place in which to teach them, he goes up a hillside. For Matthew, the hill has symbolic value. It was on the mountain of Sinai that Moses received the Law from God.

Matthew is deftly suggesting that Jesus, surrounded by his disciples (just as a rabbi would be surrounded by his disciples or students), is a kind of new Moses. Much of what he will teach will echo the teaching Moses received on Mount Sinai and passed on to Israel. He will also exercise the kind of authority in interpreting that Law that no rabbi would ever have assumed. Rabbis sat to deliver teaching: Jesus sits to deliver the sermon.

The opening part of the sermon is usually known as the Beatitudes. "Beatitude" means "blessedness". Matthew has nine beatitudes. Each follows a set form – the first part proclaims that certain people are blessed. The second part promises them a reward (the kingdom of heaven, mercy, etc.). They fall into two sets of four, with the final longer beatitude on responding to persecution standing alone.

What is surprising about Jesus' beatitudes is that they do not simply repeat the blessings of the Old Testament. The Old Testament praised with a beatitude those who were kind to the poor ("happy are those who are kind to the poor" [Prov 14:21], for example), but would never have considered poverty a blessing. By contrast, the beatitudes of Jesus show that God is on the side of those who are weak and outcast.

Such a standard turns the world upside down: to live by the beatitudes requires a strong commitment to justice and a temperament that doesn't flinch in the presence of persecution. It is only possible to live such a life if one's hopes are set on the coming of the kingdom of heaven, which will overturn the structures that oppress those who are poor.

The beatitudes turn the world's values upside down. They invert our common perception of success and failure, strength and weakness, happiness and sadness. They are our rules for life, our template for living. ■

SAY

Lord, help me to align my will with yours, as expressed in the beatitudes. Help me to follow your example.

PRAY

Jesus says, "Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God." Pray today for those who work for peace throughout our world. Give thanks for them. Remember those who are the victims of violence and warfare. Pray also for yourself – that you will always be an agent of peace.

LEARN

The beatitudes are the attitudes or values that Christians must live by, our identity card.

The Sermon on the Mount offers Jesus' vision for our world.

REFLECT

In *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis calls the beatitudes "the Christian's identity card". Nowadays, our purses or wallets are full of cards – our driving licence, social security card, bank cards, travel pass, club cards of one kind or another. We carry many identity cards, but the most important card we carry is not in our wallets. It is in our hearts, shown in our actions, showcased in our daily living. Pope Francis says: "If anyone asks: what must one do to be a good Christian?" then "the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount." We gain true happiness by aligning our wills with the will of God, as expressed in the beatitudes. In living like this, Pope Francis says, we become saints.

This challenge can seem too demanding. But not if we break it down, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. Pope Francis gives a simple description of how to do this. "This holiness to which the Lord calls you," he says, "will grow through small gestures. Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbour and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: 'No, I will not speak badly of anyone.' This is a step forward in holiness. Later, at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step."

These ordinary gestures are an example of holiness any of us can make any day. Making the ordinary extraordinary, the seemingly insignificant significant. That's how we become saints.

The beatitudes are our doorway to holiness. Live them, and you'll be a saint. ■

DO

Take some time to read the beatitudes slowly. How well are you trying to live them?

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Save us, O Lord our God!
And gather us from the nations,
to give thanks to your holy name,
and make it our glory to praise you.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Grant us, Lord our God,
that we may honour 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 in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

A reading from the prophet Zephaniah.

Seek the Lord
all you, the humble of the earth,
who obey his commands.
Seek integrity,
seek humility:
you may perhaps find shelter
on the day of the anger of the Lord.
In your midst I will leave
a humble and lowly people,
and those who are left in Israel will seek
refuge in the name of the Lord.
They will do no wrong,
will tell no lies;
and the perjured tongue will no longer
be found in their mouths.
But they will be able to graze and rest
with no one to disturb them.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 145

Response:

**How happy are the poor in spirit;
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

or
Alleluia!

1. It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever,
who is just to those who are oppressed.
It is he who gives bread to the hungry,
the Lord, who sets prisoners free. (R.)

2. It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind,
who raises up those who are bowed
down,
the Lord, who protects the stranger
and upholds the widow and orphan. (R.)

3. It is the Lord who loves the just
but thwarts the path of the wicked.
The Lord will reign for ever,
Zion's God, from age to age. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the
Corinthians.

Take yourselves, brothers, at the time when
you were called: how many of you were
wise in the ordinary sense of the word, how
many were influential people, or came from
noble families? No it was to shame the wise
that God chose what is foolish by human
reckoning, and to shame what is strong that
he chose what is weak by human reckoning;
those whom the world thinks common and
contemptible are the ones that God has
chosen – those who are nothing at all to show
up those who are everything. The human race
has nothing to boast about to God, but you,
God has made members of Christ Jesus and
by God's doing he has become our wisdom,
and our virtue, and our holiness, and our
freedom. As scripture says: if anyone wants to
boast, let him boast about the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Blessed are you, Father,
Lord of heaven and earth,
for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom
to mere children.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Matthew 5:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Matthew.

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill.
There he sat down and was joined by his
disciples. Then he began to speak. This is
what he taught them:

“How happy are the poor in spirit;
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy the gentle:
they shall have the earth for their heritage.
Happy those who mourn:
they shall be comforted.
Happy those who hunger and thirst for what
is right:
they shall be satisfied.
Happy the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown them.
Happy the pure in heart:
they shall see God.
Happy the peacemakers:
they shall be called sons of God.
Happy those who are persecuted in the
cause of right:
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Happy are you when people abuse you
and persecute you and speak all kinds of
calumny against you on my account. Rejoice
and be glad, for your reward will be great in
heaven.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

O Lord, we bring to your altar
these offerings of our service:
be pleased to receive them, we pray,
and transform them
into the Sacrament of our redemption
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Let your face shine on your servant.
Save me in your merciful love.
O Lord, let me never be put to shame, for I
call on you.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Nourished by these redeeming gifts,
we pray, O Lord,
that through this help to eternal salvation
true faith may ever increase.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.