

Sermon

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Micah 6:1-8

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Psalm 15

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Matthew 5:1-12

At the age of eighteen, I made a conscious decision to leave God and the church. I didn't want to hear anything about God or of the church. I felt that God had abandoned me, and I proceeded to live life the way I felt life should be lived. Being out in the world for thirty plus years living my life, I found myself reluctantly being led back to the church.

I found myself sitting in a bible class, not knowing a thing about the bible, or even how to navigate myself around in the bible. Some one put a bible in my hand, and my hand began to shake. Everyone in this bible class had their own suggestions on how to begin navigating their way around in the bible.

“Start from the letters written by Paul,” some one suggested. “No, you need to start with the gospels,” was another suggestion.

I picked up the bible that was given to me, and randomly opened it, and it opened to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5. I started reading this chapter, not knowing what I was reading, at the time, I found myself drawn to not only chapter 5, but chapters 6 and 7, of Matthew's Gospel as well.

There was something special about these particular chapters, I couldn't put my finger on it, but through these particular chapters, over time, I found serenity, and forgiveness. Not only forgiveness for myself, but, over time, I was able to forgive those who had done some serious harm to me.

I carried that bible with me, every where I went. I read chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Matthew's Gospel, faithfully, every day, sometimes, two and three times a day, for over two years. All during that time, I never once thought, that one day, I would be standing in a pulpit, giving a sermon on Matthew's Gospel chapter 5. The wonders of God never cease!

Today's Gospel reading, Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5: 1-12 is the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Today's reading is all about the Beatitudes. Jesus begins his sermon, with the word **BLESSED**.

According to the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the word **BLESSED**, has the following meanings: held in reverence, venerated: honored in worship: enjoying the bliss of heaven---used as a title for a beatified person, for example, The **BLESSED** Virgin Mary, **BLESSED** Saint Theresa of Avila, and **BLESSED** Saint Ignatius of Antioch.

(2)

I understand that some time in May, Pope John Paul II, will, also become beatified, as well. He will then be known as, **BLESSED** Pope John Paul II.

To become beatified, I'm told, is the proven knowledge or fact, here on earth, through some sort of miracle that is to have been performed by a particular person, who is believed to have gone to heaven. It is through this proven miracle, one can petition the church to have this person considered for beatification. It is through this proven miracle, that a particular person is absolutely in heaven and is definitely, enjoying the happiness of heaven.

In today's gospel reading, we hear that the crowd of people, who had been following Jesus, has grown, and therefore is forcing Jesus to seek higher ground. Jesus' popularity had grown tremendously, since Jesus had been going around in Galilee, Syria, Jerusalem, and beyond the Jordan, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and sickness, from those people that had been brought to him.

I find it very interesting, that Jesus, who left his rightful place in heaven, to come down to earth, to show us how to live, and to save us, would address this crowd of ordinary people, with the word, **BLESSED**. It would seem to me that it would be the other way around.

With divine compassion, Jesus spoke to this crowd of ordinary people, some of which had been oppressed for a long time. Some were sinners, some were without hope. This crowd of people who had come to hear Jesus speak, I'm guessing, were those whom had been labeled as the outcast by society.

With divine compassion, Jesus addresses those within the crowd who have lost their spirit, who are mourning, who have been labeled meek and mild. Those who are hungry and thirst for justice. Those who do believe in mercy, and who believe in making peace, and those in the crowd who are being persecuted for whatever reason, and those who are being falsely accused for whatever. Jesus addresses all of these people with the title of **BLESSED**.

With divine love, and compassion, Jesus venerates this crowd of ordinary people, who are hungry and thirst for, any sign of a miracle, for truth and justice, a place of honor, in the kingdom of heaven.

To those in the crowd, who were looking for some sort of sign, Jesus reassured them, that the kingdom of God was very near, by sharing with them what it would be like, to be in heaven.

Jesus reassured the people in this crowd that the Messiah had come, and all that was needed was for them to follow Him. Follow me, and you **WILL** be comforted, you **WILL** inherit the earth. Those who are hungry and thirst, **WILL** be filled, you **WILL** receive mercy, and you **WILL** be called children of God. Follow me, and you **WILL** see God.

Jesus through his divine love and compassion, had lifted up the lowly, and had venerated them, and beatified them to the honor of **BLESSED**.

(3)

Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5:1-12, are the beginning verses, of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus who is sitting at the top of that mountain, has venerated us and has beatified us to the honor of **BLESSED**.

Listen to Jesus' words, to us:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for your is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for you will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for you will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for you will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for you will see God.

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.”

These are words that Jesus proclaimed to a crowd of ordinary people, just like you and I. We can, I'm sure, identify, at some point in our lives, with a least one of these verses, I know that I can truly identify with, at least one, in particular.

Jesus is inviting all of us to come, and enjoy the bliss of heaven, with him.

Jesus invites all of us through the Eucharist to come and follow him.

“I am the bread of life. Who ever comes to me, **WILL** never be hungry, and whoever believes in me, **WILL** never be thirsty. Yours **WILL** be the kingdom of heaven. **COME!**”