

In Sunday's Gospel reading from Matthew, we hear Jesus speak what is commonly referred to as the Beatitudes. As we reflect on the Beatitudes, it might be best to look at how Matthew introduces them: "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..." In speaking about those who are blessed, Jesus teaches us about God.

One of the things Jesus teaches us in the Beatitudes is that God's ways are not our ways. Jesus' words are so familiar to us, but we can only wonder on what their impact might have been on the crowd who came to hear Him. Perhaps then we can see how radical Jesus' words really are. To say to the people that the poor, and the mourning and the meek and the merciful *and* the persecuted are blessed was probably not what they were used to hearing. Many of them had the belief that the rich and the powerful were the ones blessed by God, and that misfortune was an indication of God's punishment (See the book of Job, where his friends tell him that he must have done something wrong to have all those things happen to him, or John 9, where the disciples ask about the man born blind). Many people today have that same belief, and so some people reason that their focus should be on getting everything they desire, as their success will be an indication of God's blessing. The Beatitudes tell us to focus on something other than satisfying our every desire. They tell us to focus on putting our trust in God and doing God's will; to follow God's ways, rather than our own. And so we are called to be "poor in spirit," relying on God. We are called to hope for comfort when we mourn. We are called to "hunger and thirst for righteousness," not for the things of the world. We are called to be "meek," refraining from doing violence to others. We are called to be "clean of heart," single-minded in following Jesus.

Another thing that Jesus teaches us is that God is the One who blesses. As St. Paul says to the Corinthians in our second reading, "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.'" We do not bless others in ourselves. Instead, as we are blessed in grace and in God's love for us in Jesus, we are called to share the blessings we have received. We are called to let God's love and grace flow *through* us for the sake of others. And so we are called to show mercy, and to make peace.

To put what the Beatitudes teach us into practice is seldom easy. There are many voices, some even in the name of God, who call us in a different direction. The more closely we follow Jesus, there may be more people who insult us, or talk about us in a negative way. In different parts of the world, there are people who still put their lives on the line, responding to these words of Jesus.

Are we willing to be taught by the Beatitudes? Are we willing for them to be life lessons for us? Are we willing to have Jesus' words turn the world's ideas about life upside-down? Jesus *does* promise us blessings, even in the face of persecution. God *is* faithful, and will give us what we need.

May God continue to bless us all, and may share His blessings with the world.

In Christ,

Fr. Phil, CP