

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - The New Blessed Ones

Feb 1, 2026

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus lays out some of his principal teachings. Today, he gives us the Beatitudes. And as usual, Jesus turns things upside down and says some very unexpected things! Jesus went up a mountain to teach his followers his greatest teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount. In the sermon, Jesus talks about those who are "blessed". To our ears today, this sounds poetic and consoling. But when Jesus mentions the "blessed ones" in the Beatitudes, he really would have caught the attention of his audience. These people thought they knew exactly who the "Blessed Ones" were: the rich and the powerful. But they were wrong. Even St. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1: 26-31), "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is low and despised in the world...to reduce to nothing things that are..." God's preference for the lowly is good news for most of us, and it truly does turn the world's values upside down.

In the Mediterranean world of Jesus, honour is the central value and it drives all behaviour. Honour is a public claim to worth and a public acknowledgement by others of that claim. Even in Moses time, he praise the tribes of Israel with this beatitude: "Truly honourable are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! (Deut 33:29) Salvation by the Lord and public service from conquered enemies are publicly demonstrated and confirmed claims to honour. Jesus too proposed honourable behaviour in the familiar format of beatitudes. In Jesus' view, true honour and esteem are determined and bestowed by God, very publicly, for all to see. Things that God considers truly honourable and worthy of praise are almost always the opposite of what human beings of any culture think. Our minds grapple to make sense of this. How can a person who is crying and hurting be blessed? How can those experiencing persecution be blessed? In light of heaven, it all makes sense. Until then, we have to accept in faith that what Jesus says is true.

When Jesus gave this sermon, he was standing on a site in the Holy Land that looks out over the Sea of Galilee. He had a multitude of people around him. In the crowd were men and women who were mourning, hungering for righteousness, meek and persecuted. Jesus spoke to their suffering hearts. These were living witnesses to the blessedness of those who mourn, who suffer persecution, and affliction. The Beatitudes are a Christ-like, and therefore God-like, way of living. Being faithful to God is not easy. Being a disciple of Jesus is not easy. Our Lord never promised to make things in our lives on earth easy. Rather, Jesus opened up the gates of heaven. He promised that if we carry our cross, we will arrive in paradise, where every tear will be wiped away!

Going up the mountain, following Christ, is an essential part of Christian life. When Jesus saw the crowd, he invites them to follow him up the mountain. As he goes up the mountain, symbolically, something very important is happening. In the Old Testament, God met the people of Israel on a mountain. Back then, it was only Moses who went up Mt. Sinai. The people stayed at the bottom, not able to draw close to God. Now, in the New Testament, things have changed. Jesus has "come down" to us. He invites us as a people to "go up", altogether, to meet the Lord. We are with Jesus, the New Moses, as he gives us a new law, contained in the Sermon on the Mount which is a face-to-face encounter with God. We are all called to be a saint. A saint is a person who never gives up the quest for God. Each day is a new way to grow in holiness, a new offering of our life to make to God. As such, until we enter heaven, being "on the move" is going to be a part of our lives. Christ is always beckoning us further on this journey. Unfortunately, many souls stop along the way. Climbing a mountain requires consistent hard work. It is about

putting one foot in front of the other, slowly ascending the heights. It is not accomplished all at once but takes time and perseverance. Becoming a saint, likewise, is a daily grind and effort. Over a lifetime, these small steps upward do lead us to true growth in holiness.

As Jesus was delivering the beatitudes, he is telling us he is the embodiment of the beatitudes. He is the meek, the one hunger and thirst for righteousness, he is merciful, he is pure in heart, he is the peacemaker, he is persecuted for righteousness' sake, he is the one whom people revile, persecute, he is the one who has to face all kinds of evil and falsely accused. But his reward is winning the kingdom of God for all God's people. His cross is his crown. We could consider what he may have said if we were standing before him at that moment. If Jesus were to give us a specific beatitude, what would it be? Think of something hard in our life, maybe a relationship, maybe forgiving someone, maybe a job we dislike but need for our family, maybe the way a person in our life speaks or acts. Perhaps these can be sources in a beatitude that Jesus may give to us. In some way, a personal cross that we carry in life is our personal "Beatitude" from Jesus. The beatitudes give us cause for reflection as they turn our normal value system upside down, forcing us to confront whether we are guided by the gospel or by the pattern set by society. Their message contradicts our common sense approach to life yet they are the guidelines of Christ to us on how to spend this life, in order one day to enjoy eternity with him in heaven. Real happiness doesn't come from wealth, power or prestige. Real happiness doesn't focus on the 'me, my, mine' world. Being blessed in this life is not about material possessions or good health. Rather, it means receiving God's grace. It means in a sense, having the wind of the Holy Spirit at our back, gently carrying us along the path to heaven. Jesus is saying that those who are suffering now in patience and humility are people living an honourable life, they are happy because they are on their way to heaven. These little ones are on the joyful path that leads to God. It's like an expression of encouragement, walking firmly on a road without obstacles. Let's ask ourselves, "Is the way I am living my life leading me to heaven? Is the path I am on going to bring me true blessedness?" If not, I need to rethink my life and make the changes necessary to return to the narrow way of Christ. Being a follower of Christ is not meant to be easy as it calls us to do things that don't come naturally to us. Jesus is still speaking to us, wanting to make us happy, blessed, giving us a joy which shines through sorrow and suffering and which nothing in life or death can take away.