

Cycle A 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Zep 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.

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

R. 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!

Reading II, 1 Cor 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, Mt 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."

What kind of person does God want us to be? It is not an easy question to answer. But it is a question that we Catholics are expected to address throughout our lives. The Catechism explains that *"Deep within our conscience we discover a law which we have not laid upon ourselves, but which we must obey. Its voice, ever calling us to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in our heart at the right moment...For we have in our heart a law inscribed by God...Our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths. Moral conscience, present in our hearts, commands us at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil...When we listen to our conscience, we can hear God speaking. Return to your conscience, question it...Turn inward and in everything you do, see God as your witness."* This never-ending search everyone, young and old, must undertake for themselves in order to find out what is worthy and what is not worthy...it is what we Catholics call the "formation of conscience." Today's Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to teach us what kind of person He wants us to be...and He chooses us to continue His work every day of our lives.

To understand today's Gospel, we need to understand that in the time and world of Jesus, honor was a central value that drove all behavior. Honor was a public claim to worth and a public acknowledgment by others. The Beatitudes, which begin Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, are unique in several respects, but they are among the more than eighty "beatitudes" sprinkled throughout the Old and New Testaments. These are poetic sayings that present, encourage, and praise honorable behavior. So, rather than "happy," "fortunate," or even "blessed," the first word in each beatitude should more correctly be translated "truly honorable". In Jesus' view, true honor and esteem are determined and bestowed by God, very publicly, for all to see. But, the things that God considers truly honorable and worthy of praise are almost always the opposite of what we think. The Scriptures today tell us the kind of person God wants us to be...to humbly seek Him....to be poor in spirit, that is, to be totally dependent on God in every situation...in everyday life

joys and disappointments....in every day pain, mourning and even persecution, we must keep God at the center of our lives. We must respond with an attitude of meekness; hungering for Jesus; being merciful to others; being clean of heart; being a peacemaker. It is not easy and does not always feel comfortable...but it is the kind of person He wants us to be.

As St. Augustine asked, *“How is it, then, that I seek you, Lord? Since in seeking you, my God, I seek a happy life, let me seek you so that my soul may live, for my body draws life from my soul and my soul draws life from you.”*

As we form our consciences we choose to be close to God and He promises His Kingdom. Today we can taste a glimmer of that promise if we respond to His call with an attitude of conversion. In the routine of coming to Church we hear and recognize His presence in the Scriptures...we can be converted by awakening to His presence...we open ourselves to His life, death and resurrection in the Holy Eucharist. As we come forward to receive Communion, we humbly seek Him and thereby experience the Kingdom of Heaven. If we are not in full communion with the Catholic Church or are in need of reconciliation with God’s grace, we shouldn’t take Communion. But, please do come up to receive the blessing of God.

Years ago I had the chance for a rather extraordinary way to form our consciences. I heard Sr. Helen Prejean, the renowned author of Dead Man Walking, help us probe the difficult questions of how Christians respond to violent crime and the death penalty. Of how we need to respond to support the victims, but also are called to share the love of Jesus with the guilty. It was a time for us to dig deep returning to our consciences with many questions . . . it was a time for us to turn inward with God as our witness to confront our prejudices and be challenged by what an apostle of Jesus is called to do. Jesus taught us that the Kingdom of God is for everyone.

And if we let Him, He will teach us what kind of person He wants us to be.