

The Sermon on the Mount 1: The Beatitudes (4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Introduction: 6 Weeks on the Sermon on the Mount

Augustine: “If anyone were to ponder with piety and seriousness the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ gave on the mount, I believe that he would discover there, as far as norms for high moral living are concerned, the perfect way to lead the Christian life.” (*The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, 1.1; trans. M. G. Campbell; cf. CCC 1966).

The New Law/Gospel: “expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount” (CCC 1965)

Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13—Seek the Lord, all You Humble

1. Remnant of Israel: Hebrew *‘ani*: “poor, afflicted, humble”; *dal*: “low, weak, poor”

Psalm 146—The Lord raises up the Lowly

1. The Lord cares for the oppressed, hungry, blind, strangers, widows, orphans (vv.7-9)

Matthew 5:1-12—The Beatitudes

1. Mountain: Jesus is the *New Moses* (cf. Exodus 19-20; Deut 18)
 - a. Moses: came *down* Mount Sinai (10 Commandments; earthly kingdom)
 - b. Jesus: went *up* the Mountain (New Law of the Gospel; kingdom of heaven)
 2. Beatitudes: “The heart of Jesus’ preaching” (CCC 1716)
 - a. The secret of “happiness” (Latin *beatus*)
 - b. Greek: “Happy (*makarios*) are the...” (not usual word for “blessed”)
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1. Poor in Spirit: those who are humble (Gk. *ptōchos*, “dependent,” “needy”)
 2. Mourners: those who lament sin, suffering, and death
 3. Meek: (Gk. *praus*, “gentle”); those who yield to insults; conquer evil with good
 4. Hunger/Thirst for Righteousness: those who are ‘starving’ for holiness/justice
 5. Merciful: those who forgive the faults of others
 6. Pure in Heart: (Gk. *katharos*, “clean”, “pure”); those who act with integrity
 7. Peacemakers: those who reconcile with others and foster reconciliation
 8. Persecuted: those who are slandered, falsely accused, reviled for Jesus’ sake

The Catechism on the Beatitudes

1. They depict “the countenance of Jesus Christ” (CCC 1717)
2. “Actions and attitudes characteristic of Christian life” (CCC 1717)
3. “Paradoxical promises”: sustain hope in the midst of trials (CCC 1717)
 - a. Law of Moses: lists blessings (fertility, flocks, food, wealth) and ‘curses’ for disobedience (infertility, famine, poverty, exile) (Deut 28)
 - b. New Testament: Jesus lists only ‘blessings’? (Matt 5)
 - c. Beatitudes: the ‘curses’ and the blessings are *combined*

The Mass Readings Explained

d. The Secret of Happiness: the Cross of Christ (Gal 3:13)

4. The Beatitudes:

a. Respond to “the natural desire for happiness” (CCC 1718)

b. Reveal “the goal of human existence” (CCC 1719)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (4th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. The *Catechism* of the Catholic Church describes the Sermon on the Mount as the “New Law” (see CCC 1965-1974). What are the essential characteristics of this New Law?

2. The very first of the Beatitudes is “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” But what does this mean? Read the section on “Poverty of Heart” in the *Catechism* (CCC 2544-47). What light does the Church shed on this mystery?

3. The *Catechism* says that the Beatitudes depict the “countenance” or “face” of Christ. How did Jesus exemplify each of the eight beatitudes in his own life? Which one stands out for you most when you think of Jesus? Which one doesn’t? Why?

For Further Study

Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 84-93. An excellent mid-level commentary on the Beatitudes with lots of background and insights.

Saint Augustine, “The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” in *The New Testament I and II* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2014), 23-30. The classic patristic exposition of the Beatitudes by one of the great Doctors of the Church.