

**The Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Jeremiah 17:5-8
<i>Response</i>	Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4, 6
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Rejoice and be glad; your reward will be great in heaven.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 6:17, 20-26

The 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time in Year C takes us into the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke's gospel, which is his version of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. Now one of the things that you'll notice if you compare Luke's account of Jesus' famous sermon — including the Beatitudes and some of those other sayings we're going to look at — with Matthew's account, is the first thing that appears to be a discrepancy has to do with the setting of this famous sermon — as well as some of the contents as we'll see. So what you'll sometimes hear scholars say is that whereas in the gospel of Matthew (Chapter 5) Jesus gives a sermon on the "mount", in the gospel of Luke Jesus gives a sermon on the "plain". So you'll hear this actually called the Sermon on the Plain. This actually goes back to the King James Version of the New Testament, which says in chapter 6, verse 17, that Jesus came down with them and stood in the plain. As an American, when I think about the sermon on the mount versus the sermon on the plain, I think of Jesus standing on top of one of the Rockies for the first sermon, and then in the other one he's somewhere in Nebraska, giving the sermon on the plains. But I just want to make clear that that's probably actually a misleading translation in contemporary English of the setting of Jesus' sermon in the Gospel of Luke. In fact, a strong case can be made that there's a sermon on the mount in the Gospel of Matthew and a sermon on the plain in Luke. In other words, these are two different versions of the same, famous sermon.

Now you can't see that if you just look at the reading for today, because the reading for today begins in verse 17, when it says, "Jesus came down with them to a level place" (or "came down with them in the plain" in the King James Version). You have to put that work in context, because if you back up to verse 12 of Luke's

gospel, we actually learn (it says this): “In these days, he went out into the hills” or literally, he went up the mountain to pray, “and all night he continued in prayer to God” (that’s verse 12), and then it says that when the night was over he called his 12 Apostles, (and then verse 17), “and he came down with them and stood on a level place”. So it’s interesting here, the New American Bible says, “He came down and stood on a stretch of level ground”, the RSV says, “he stood on a level place”, the Greek is *topou pedinou*, which literally means “a flat place”. *Topos* is “place”, *pedinou* means “flat.”

If you look at the setting (back at verse 12), he went *eis to oros*, “up the mountain to pray”, and then a few verses later he came down and stood on a flat place. The implication is actually that what Jesus has done is he’s ascended to a summit of a mountain to pray all night long before choosing his Apostles, but when he comes down to give the sermon, he comes down to a flat place on the mountainside where he can then preach to the disciples and the crowds and give this sermon. You’re not going to give a sermon up on the top of a cliff, right? So, as people have noticed, when you put the whole thing in context, there is no contradiction in which in Matthew he gives it on a mountain and in Luke he gives it on the plains of Nebraska. No, if you’ve even been to Galilee you would know that what they call “mountains”, we would call “hills” (well maybe not in Louisiana, we would think they were mountains), but other places in the United States would call these “mountains” (like Mount Tabor in Galilee), they’re basically the equivalent of a hill. They have flat places on the side, and to this day you can actually go to the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount, which is on a mountainside. It’s not at the peak of the mountain, it’s a mountainside; and it’s actually a rather gradual slope anyway. In any case, just want to point out here that, in sum, there’s no contradiction between Matthew and Luke about a sermon on the mount vs. a sermon on the plain. They’re both set on a mountain (or a mountainside) and they both have the same basic contents: the Beatitudes, as well as several other important teachings of Jesus. With that said, the form of those teachings is different in Luke’s account. So we want to look at Luke’s account of this famous sermon and see what he tells us about what Jesus did and what Jesus said in this famous sermon.

Luke 6:17, 20-26 is the gospel reading for today. So I’ll read all those verses, and then we’ll unpack them.

And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon...<sup>1</sup>

And then the lectionary skips down to verse 20:

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. "But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. "Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Alright, stop there. The first thing you should notice, immediately, is that Luke's account of Jesus' sermon (and the beatitudes) differs from Matthew's on a couple of points:

First, most of us know the Beatitudes in the form they're found in Matthew's gospel, in which you have 8 Beatitudes (that's the normal numbering). Eight blessings, eight declarations about what it means to be truly happy and what happiness in the new covenant looks like as a disciple of Jesus. Whereas Luke, we only have four Beatitudes instead of eight.

Another thing you might notice is that in Matthew's gospel the Beatitudes are formulated in the third person. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted." "Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the Earth." Whereas in Luke's account, it's second person; and they're shorter. "Blessed are you poor...blessed are you that hunger...blessed are you that weep...and blessed are you who are persecuted." So that's another element.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

A third difference that's interesting is the presence of woes. And this is really significant because these aren't in...well, they're not in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Jesus will pronounce some woes over the Pharisees in Matthew 23, but not here...so the presence of the woes. "Woe to you who are rich...Woe to you who are full...Woe to you who are laughing." (So all comedians, you're out) "Woe to you who are praised by other men."

What's Jesus doing here? Well, a "woe" in the New Testament (I keep thinking of "whoa", it doesn't have the same connotation that expression has in English)...but "woe" is an archaic English translation for a "curse" or a "judgment". So there are those who are blessed, and then there are those who are cursed. There are those who are going to be happy and those who are going to be judged. So we have these four woes to compliment the four beatitudes.

What are we to make of these things? I mean this is some mysterious stuff. What exactly is Jesus saying here? In particular, some questions are: why does Jesus, for example, pronounce this woe upon people who laugh? I remember when I was an undergraduate, one of my professors really made a lot out of that particular woe. "Why would Jesus condemn people who laugh? It's good to laugh, people who laugh are joyful. There's nothing wrong with laughter. This is just bizarre." But I think we want to remember that whenever you see something bizarre in the New Testament, the key to understanding it is usually found in the Old Testament. That's a pretty consistent theme.

So, I think for me, the key to understanding the Beatitudes (whether in the form that Matthew gives us or in the form that's given to us in the Gospel of Luke) is to remember "the first Moses" who gave teachings on a mountain in the Old Testament. Jesus is like a new Moses giving us a new sermon, a new teaching from a new mountain. Well if you go back to the Old Testament, especially in the book of Deuteronomy, in the exodus from Egypt, Moses not only gives the people the Ten Commandments (from Mt. Sinai), he also gives them a list of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28.

Now, I'm not going to read it in full, and it isn't the Old Testament reading for today (so there's no parallel here), but I do think it's important for us to understand the background because a lot of people are put off by Luke's account of the beatitudes because they're pretty harsh, especially when you add in the woes. What's wrong with being rich? What's wrong with eating a good meal? What's wrong with laughing? What's wrong with people praising you and saying good things about

you? I mean, truly, there's nothing wrong with any of these things, and yet Jesus is pronouncing a curse on all those who are rich, all those who have full bellies (So, does that apply to you? Did you have a good meal last night?), all those who laugh, and all those who have good things said about them. So, what do we make of that?

Well I think if you go back to the Old Testament you'll see. In Deuteronomy 28, let me just run a few verses by you real quick. In the Old Testament Moses gave a list of blessings and woes as well. He gave a list of blessings for obedience, and a list of woes (or curses) for disobedience. And listen to what it says.

And if you obey the voice of the LORD your God (this is Moses speaking to the Israelites), being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; and he will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you. The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in his ways.

If you skip down to verse 11:

And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground, within the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.

Those are the blessings. So notice, what are we describing here? If you obey, you're going to have lots of children, you're going to have plentiful crops, you're going to have abundant cattle, you're going to have lots of money, you're going to have good weather, (it goes on to say) you're going to have peace in the land. Your enemies will be driven out and you will have peace and prosperity. So in the Old

Testament, if you obey, what you get is earthly blessings. And they're all good things. Fertility is good. Children are good. Cattle are good. They're all made by God. Peace is good. Peace is better than war, prosperity is better than poverty. In the sense that in poverty, people get sick, they die, they suffer; there are all kinds of natural evils associated with that. So in the Old Testament, obedience brings earthly blessings. It brings natural blessings. By contrast, disobedience brings curses. And it says here, verse 15, Deuteronomy 28:

But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and frustration, in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly, on account of the evil of your doings, because you have forsaken me.

And then it goes on, a long chapter, it's a very long, very grim chapter (Deuteronomy 28) to basically lay out that if Israel disobeys God, they're going to bring down upon themselves through their sin: infertility, famine, pestilence, poverty, war, and then eventually the worst of all the curses, is exile. They will end up being cast out of the land of Israel, the promise land; which is of course, if you know the Old Testament, exactly what ends up happening. So I bring this up because I want you to get the setting right. So Jesus is speaking to his Jewish disciples, he's speaking to Jews in Galilee; they know the Torah, they know the Law of Moses, and what does the law of Moses say? If you obey, you get lots of food, lots of children, lots of joy and peace. If you disobey, you have poverty, pestilence, hunger, famine, war and then finally exile. Now with that background in mind, look again at the beatitudes in Luke. What is Jesus saying to his disciples in Luke 6? "Blessed are you who are poor...Blessed are you who are hungry...Blessed are you who weep" and "blessed are you when men persecute you and exclude you and revile you. Rejoice on that day, for your reward is great", where? "In Heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets."

And then he flips it and says, “Woe to you who are rich...who are full...who laugh” and “who are spoken well of.” In other words, who are at peace, who are not persecuted. So what has Jesus done? In my mind, what I think’s happening here is something very significant. In the new covenant, in the teaching of Jesus from this sermon, the blessings are the curses. That’s the thing. The blessings are the curses. We don’t think of it this way. In other words, the way you will build up treasure not on earth but in heaven, is precisely through suffering. It’s through poverty. It’s through hunger. It’s through mourning. And it’s ultimately, above all, through persecution for the sake of the gospel. It’s through persecution for the sake of the son of man. By contrast, earthly blessings in the new covenant are dangerous. They’re spiritually dangerous. So what is he saying here? “Woe to you that are rich”; think about what he says elsewhere in the gospel, “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Why? Because “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. So riches have the power to drag our hearts down from heaven and focus us on earthly goods. The same thing, “Woe to you that are full now”; well what’s the problem with getting a good meal? Well, because you can get self-satisfied with earthly goods and feel all sufficient, like you don’t need God. People who are starving to death know they need God. People who are hungry know how weak they are and how dependent they are on God; but the rich and the full can get very complacent, very quickly.

The same thing about those who are laughing now. Jesus isn’t condemning all laughter, he’s talking about people, in context, whose laughter is the kind of laughter that is based and rooted in earthly joy, that distracts them from the injustice in the world, but also distracts them ultimately from the goodness of the kingdom of God. What’s he saying? “You might be laughing now, but you’re going to mourn or weep if you miss out on the kingdom of heaven.” And then finally, “when all men speak well of you, so their fathers did to the false prophets.” So the false prophets were there, they were at peace, nobody was persecuting them, but it didn’t mean that they were right with God. It actually meant that they were lying and that they were acquiring peace through their falsehood and not through the grace and the gift of God. So he’s talking about the dangers that are inherent in earthly goods, and the fact that in the new covenant now the blessings are rooted in what appear to be curses.

Now whenever I teach this to my students sometimes there’s a negative reaction. People say, “Come on, that’s a little strong Dr. Pitre, wouldn’t you say? To say that

in the new covenant the blessings are the curses and the curses are the blessings.” If it’s too strong then tell me why we have a crucifix at the center of every church. How did the ultimate blessing of blessings come to the world? How did the kingdom of heaven come to earth? It’s through the cross. It’s through a man who looks like he’s cursed. It’s through a man who is poor, who has nothing, who is mourning, who’s been stripped of everything, who’s been persecuted; he is the most blessed man of all.

And, in fact, if you look at the Greek word here, I keep saying “blessed”, but the Greek word that Luke uses is *makarios*, which actually doesn’t mean “blessed”, it means “happy”. The precise meaning of *makarios* is “someone who is happy”. So where do we find real happiness in the new covenant? It’s through detachment from earthly goods, detachment from earthly blessings, and through taking up the cross and following Christ. So in the very beginning here, in Luke chapter 6, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is already preaching the way of the cross, but he’s doing it under the form of the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are not just some nice sayings about the attitudes we should have — although they do give us a window into what our attitude towards created goods and earthly goods should be. At the same time, they’re not simple, nice little phrases; they are explosive. They are a powerful challenge to every one of us about the way of the cross, and Jesus is going to talk more about that as we move through the Gospel of Luke. Unless you take up your cross daily and follow me, you can’t be my disciple. That’s the way of the cross that Jesus is laying out here.

Let’s back up then to the Old Testament. Is there any precedent for this in the Old Testament, what’s the reading for today, and why is that particular passage chosen? Well, if you go back to the Old Testament, Jeremiah 17, we have a brief selection for today. It’s verses 5-8, it’s another set of blessings and curses. In this case, it’s Jeremiah the prophet pronouncing them. And this is what he says:

Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."



Notice, Jeremiah gives a real important insight here. Whereas in Moses' curses and blessings in Deuteronomy that I read earlier, Moses just says "Obedience, blessing. Disobedience, cursing" (or punishment), Jeremiah adds a nuance to it that's important. He says "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, whose heart turns away from the Lord." That's really crucial because what I was talking about earlier (especially those of us in the west, in a wealthy country or maybe who live in a very stable society where there's lots of access to earthly goods), it's easy for us to be put off by Jesus' statement ("woe to you who are rich" or "woe to you who are full", "woe to you who laugh"), but we have to remember, Jeremiah has this right. It's not just that the man is trusting in man, it's that his heart is turned away from God, and it's easy for earthly goods and earthly stability and earthly wealth to turn our hearts away from God. That's really the main issue there: is his heart with God? And once he turns his heart away from God, he becomes like a shrub in the desert. Which, in other words, "doesn't bear any fruit." We're going to look at what Jesus says about good fruit and bad fruit in just a minute. That's going to be the end of the sermon on the plain. By contrast, "blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord." Why? Because his heart is with God. He's going to be like a tree planted by water that even when there's a drought (in other words, even when there's a lack of, for example, of earthly goods, when famine comes or when pestilence comes), he's still going to trust in God, because he hasn't put his trust in his own power, or in earthly goods, but in the Lord. The irony here (so-to-speak) is that this tree, this righteous man, doesn't cease to bear fruit, even in a time of drought.

If that last line of Jeremiah rings a bell, if it sounds familiar, it's because it's almost verbatim with Psalm 1. The first Psalm in the book of Psalms, Psalm 1, uses the exact same image of a man who is blessed and a man who is cursed, and the image of a tree and the image of a dry shrub. After Psalm 23, this is one of the most famous psalms, and it also happens to be the Responsorial Psalm for today. So the link from Jeremiah 17 to Psalm 1 is what establishes the bridge between the old and the new testaments. So Psalm 1, beautiful psalm, I'll just read it to you. It says this:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will

not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

So what is this psalm doing? It's setting up the famous "two ways." There are two ways of life: the way of righteousness, the way of wickedness. So it's interesting here that the first line there, "Blessed is the man", is actually, in Hebrew, the word is *ashar*, which doesn't mean "blessed", it means "happy". *Barak* is the normal word (verb) for "blessed", but *ashar* means "happy". So it's interesting that Jesus uses the same word when he gives the beatitudes as you find in the psalm here: happy.

So what makes a man happy? Well first he has to avoid sin. You want to be happy? Stop sinning. Don't walk in the way of the sinners or the seat of scoffers. If you follow the way of sin, you're never going to be happy. Sin never leads to happiness. That's the negative part. The positive part, the positive key to happiness, is loving God and loving his word. Notice it says "his delight is in the law of the Lord." The Hebrew word there for law is *Torah*. It means the scriptures, the law of God; commandments. So his delight is in the *Torah* of the Lord and on his law he meditates, twice a year during lent. No, that was a joke. No, it doesn't say he meditates "every now and then", it doesn't say he meditates "once a year", it says he meditates on his law day and night; over and over again, habitually. So the law of the Lord is what gives him life. It's what gives him...as a tree...it's what makes him bear fruit. Using the analogy of the tree, the man is the tree, the streams of water are the Torah, the Scriptures.

Sometimes people say to me, "Dr. Pitre, I just feel, spiritually, so dry."  
And I will say, "well are you reading your Bible every day? Do you read the word of God every day?"

"Well no, I don't have time, I'm busy."

"Okay, well don't expect to feel fruitful and expect to feel dry if you're not going to the stream of living water every day and drinking."

When you get up in the morning, if you don't drink any water all day and you come to me at the end of the day and say, "Oh, I'm really, really thirsty, I don't know what's the matter."

And I say, "Did you drink anything today?"

My kids sometimes do this, kids are crazy though. They play all day long, “Oh I don’t feel so good daddy. I’m feeling nauseous.”

“Well did you drink anything today?”

“Uh, no.”

“Okay, well maybe you should go and get a glass of water and maybe you won’t be nauseated anymore.” Sorry, you hear my “mean daddy” coming out there, but kids don’t think sometimes. We’ll, we’re like spiritual children. “Why am I so dry? Why do I feel fruitless?” Well maybe you haven’t drunk any water in like 9 months. When’s the last time you read the Bible? Not just read it, too. We’re not talking about study, but notice what it says: “meditate on the law of the Lord, day and night.” So we really have to make meditation on scripture a regular part of our lives. And that’s a real challenge because for whatever reason, I don’t know if it’s the Protestant Reformation and the wake of that, and the counter reformation, where Catholics think “Protestants have scripture, we have tradition”, or whatever it is. Or they have scripture, we have the sacraments, I’m not sure. But there really is some truth to the widespread assumption: “well Catholics, they just don’t know their bibles. They don’t read their bibles.” Don’t get me wrong, I know lots of Catholics who spend every day reading The Magnificat, reading the mass readings and that’s wonderful and beautiful, but we still have a challenge to make habitual meditation on scripture just...that’s just what you do if you’re a Catholic. That’s what it should be. That’s the expectation. That’s what we should be doing; at least that’s the expectation of the psalm, the first psalm in the book which was inspired by God, the Holy Spirit. So you might want to take his advice.

By contrast, if we don’t meditate, we’ll end up in wickedness and sin. Our hearts will turn away from God, and we’ll be like the chaff that the wind drives away — and nobody wants to be like chaff, even if you don’t really know what chaff is. It definitely sounds bad. Anyway, sorry, end of soapbox, end of rant. But, I think it’s important for us to meditate on this scripture in particular and what God is calling us to. In any case, it’s the bridge between the Old and the New Testament, because what Jesus is effectively saying is, in the beatitudes, he’s going to be the word. He’s the word made flesh, and so we’re going to have to live like he lived, and we’re going to have to imitate him if we want to be *makarios*, if we want to be happy.

So I’ll close here with a teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Beatitudes, because again, you might think, “wow that’s a different take on the beatitudes, I haven’t heard that before, is that your own opinion, your own view?”

In one sense it is, in terms of contrasting Deuteronomy and the Beatitudes, but in another sense, this is just the Church's teaching on the nature of the Beatitudes. So let me read you the summary statement on the Beatitudes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1717. I just want to highlight a few things. It says this:

The Beatitudes depict *the countenance of Jesus Christ* and portray his charity. They express *the vocation of the faithful* associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection; they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations; they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ's disciples; they have begun in the lives of the Virgin Mary and all the saints.

So notice a couple of elements there of that passage. First, "they depict the countenance of Jesus Christ", so the beatitudes give us a profile of Christ. Was he poor? Yes, he lived a life of poverty. Was he persecuted? Yes, he ended up on the cross. Was he hungry? Yes, he says, "birds of the air have their nest, the fox has a hole, the son of man has nowhere to lay his head." He lived a life of radical poverty as an itinerant preacher. Did he mourn? "Blessed are you who weep." Yes, think about it. Remember the famous scene from Lazarus, where Lazarus is dead and (I know it's not in Luke's gospel, it's in John's gospel, but still) Jesus wept. So he carried the sorrow and the sufferings of humanity on himself. He was a man of sorrow. So it's the profile of Jesus himself. They depict the face of Christ, but they also express the vocation of the faithful (number 2, the catechism says). It's our vocation to be like unto him in his Passion and his Resurrection. That means we have to be like unto him in his Passion, so we should expect to suffer as well.

Number 3, they are paradoxical promise. In other words, like I said, the blessings are the curses. It doesn't seem right for Jesus to say, "Happy are you who mourn." That doesn't make sense, it's a paradox. The precise antithesis of mourning is happiness. How can he say that I'm happy if I mourn? Well, you "will be comforted." So he's holding out here the paradoxical promises of the new covenant. They're paradoxes because it's through the cross that we receive eternal reward. So if we are hungry now, we will one day be satisfied. If we are poor now, we will one day be rich with heavenly reward. If we're weeping now we will one day laugh with joy in the kingdom of heaven, and if we're persecuted now, we will one day be exalted by God as saints among the saints. So they're paradoxes, and these paradoxes

are what should “sustain our hope in the midst of tribulation.” So when we’re suffering through these things, in whatever form we’re going to go through them, the Beatitudes should give us hope that on the other side of the cross is the Resurrection. And if you have any doubts about this, just look at the lives of the saints. The Catechism finally says that they’ve already begun in the life of the Virgin Mary and all of the saints.

Was Mary poor? Yes. Was she hungry? Yes, I’ll bet she was if they couldn’t afford enough money to even buy a lamb to do Jesus’ sacrifice — at the dedication in the temple they had to do the two turtle doves, which was the sacrifice of the poor. You think they ate big meals every night? You think Mary and Joseph were eating steak every weekend? I don’t think so. So was she poor? Yes. Was she hungry? Yes. Did she weep? You’d better believe it. “Our lady of sorrow”, she wept when she lost him, but she really wept when she lost him on the cross. She had to go through the night of the Passion and be detached from even the earthly good of her own son. She had to mourn Joseph and then lose her son as well. Was she persecuted? This is an interesting question. We don’t have any record of persecution of Mary in the New Testament, but in the early Church Fathers there are actually some traditions that after Jesus’ death Mary was persecuted by some of the local leaders of Jerusalem who weren’t happy with having the Messiah, the crucified Messiah’s mother around. She was actually driven out and she had to leave and go to different places. We don’t know that for a fact, that’s just a tradition, but my point is, Mary and all the saints...look at any one of the saints: St. Francis of Assisi – radical poverty; St. Teresa of Avila, her nuns, they ate the barest minimum. If you look at the Discalced Carmelite and the early monasteries that she was founding, one of the reasons there was so much controversy is because they lived a life of austerity. They lived a life of radical poverty, and also of eating a bare minimum to sustain their convent, to sustain their lives — they would accept gifts from people and whatnot, but it was imitating the poverty, the hunger, and...find me a saint who wasn’t persecuted. Just find me one. They don’t exist, because the saints have to go through the life of Christ; they have to recapitulate his life in them, and Jesus is teaching us that with the Beatitudes.

Finally, with regard to laughing and mourning, St. Teresa was a good laugh, but she also knew how to mourn. She was persecuted by some of her own, betrayed by some of her own friends. And that night of betrayal is something that all of the saints go through; where they have to mourn, kind of (in a sense) participating in the mystery of Judas’ betrayal, when they themselves are betrayed by their friends.

Or when they lose friends and family or loved ones; or when they lose other things, other blessings that Christ has given them. So in short, the Beatitudes show us the face of Christ; they also show us the face of the saints. So, they reveal our vocation. If we're all called to holiness, then the Beatitudes, the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, are the portrait of what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus.