



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

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When Jesus saw the crowds ... he began to speak, and he taught them. Matthew 5:1

In Matthew's eyes, Jesus is the new Moses. Thus the "new commandments" are proclaimed from a mountaintop just as the "old commandments" were proclaimed on Mount Sinai. Though every one of the "beatitudes" can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, which Jesus knew well, the formulation by this law-giver makes everything new.

The list of blessings is perhaps most revealing when it is applied to Jesus himself and we see that His life is an incarnation of each of the beatitudes. He was poor in spirit, lowly, hungry for holiness, merciful, single-hearted, a peacemaker, persecuted, insulted, slandered and sorrowful. Yet he was the most joyful person who ever lived.

The beatitudes are not simple statements of fact; they are cries of joy in the realization that God calls out the poor in spirit, the sorrowing, and so forth to "arise and be healed," (see Luke 17:19) to be what St. Paul aptly describes as the *Body of Christ* (see 1 Cor 12:27) here on earth. Christ calls us to cast His blessing, the gift of healing, upon our Community. Having most likely been healed of one or more of these infirmities ourselves, we are given the gift to pass on to others who are most in need of His mercy.

When Jesus "saw" the crowd, what did he see through His eye? Look a few chapters forward to chapter nine for the answer: "When Jesus saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were dispirited and distressed, like sheep without a shepherd." To this Shepherd of Humanity, what is compassion? It is spiritually mature empathy. There are three empathies to consider: emotional, cognitive, and compassionate. Emotional empathy is a person's automatic drive to feel and respond to another's emotions. Think of the expression, "I feel your pain." This is a good first step, but not very helpful. Cognitive empathy is the intentional recognition and understanding of another's mental and physical woundedness. Most modern medicine stops here, with physical and mental cures. But Christ calls us to go deeper with compassion. All woundedness begins with the spirit. We, therefore, need to have the spiritual sight that He has, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, have our heart and soul conformed to His in true compassion to first heal the spiritual wound, which then radiates to the mental and physical manifestations of woundedness.

Compassion is not the same as empathy or altruism. While empathy refers more generally to our ability to take the perspective of and feel the emotions of another person, compassion is when those feelings and thoughts include the desire to help. With *compassion* we not only understand a person's predicament and feel with them, but are moved to offer help. Jesus is always moved with compassion, and this is what He calls us to do. Not to just feel or understand a person's infirmity but to receive the impelling force of the Holy Spirit, which compels us to take on the heart of Jesus. This propels us to act on what we see, to bring about a powerful healing through prayer and laying of hands.

In your reflection this week, let the spirit of the Lord dwell in your heart richly. May your spirit cry out in joy as you *enflesh* His Sacred Heart, and may you abundantly pour out His grace. May you be moved to compassion, as Jesus was, to heal the poor in spirit, those who are lowly and hunger for holiness and mercy, to be single-hearted, a peacemaker, offering a healing hand to the persecuted, insulted, slandered and sorrowful. May you join Christ as the most joyful person who ever lived.

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain;
and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.
Then he began to speak, and he taught them, saying:

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward is great in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets."*

The Gospel of the Lord

