

Homily. 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year C. 28/29 January 2023.

For a long time certain people and groups who've had an issue with Jesus, Christianity and/or with Christians have labeled the Beatitudes as being like 'pie in the sky when you die. They've put forward arguments that listening to and believing in this teaching has consoled us on this earth with the promise of better things to come in heaven while numbing us from doing something to improve our lot in the here and now.

A superficial grasp of the teachings of Jesus which misunderstands the intention behind these rightly well known blessings, accompanied by an urgent desire for revolutionary social change and for power over others, underlies this criticism. Whereas the truth of the matter is that the Beatitudes are all about empowering us in hope and love, with God's vision and dream for us helping us to becoming the very best people we can be right now. They are as far away from asking us to put up with suffering today in hope of future rewards hereafter as it's possible to be.

Let me explain a little. The 9 blessings we hear from Jesus in Matthew's gospel are addressed to us, to His disciples. They trace out a pattern of living and the character which our hearts and minds are to become as we walk daily with the Lord learning from his words and example. They give us the key goals towards which we aspire now, much in the same way that the constitution of a nation or the mission statement of an organisation lays out their aims and aspirations. Without such goals and aims countries, businesses and all sorts of groups would have no clear understanding of what they're standing for, of what they're about or of why they exist in the first place.

But, we who follow Jesus way do have such aims and purpose thanks to the Lord's teaching given to us in these simple, memorable sayings.

Moreover, the Beatitudes aren't at all about the next life, the never never, but about who we are becoming in this life and world so that our next life in heaven will have meaning. These are radical, revolutionary sayings, great goals and heart felt aspirations for us everyday which ask, even challenge us, to think differently and so to act and live accordingly.

They call us to value each other, respecting and caring for the weak and needy; to be people who strive for justice and right, being generous and fair in our dealings, gentle with creation and the gifts of this world and mindful of the fragility of others. We are to have the strength and courage of peacemakers and of those who hunger and thirst for what is right, coupled with the kindness of the merciful and the humility of those who are pure of heart. There's nothing at all submissive or other worldly about such values as a way of living. In fact, well understood, the Beatitudes are some of the most demanding and counter cultural teaching Jesus ever offered; a true dying to selfishness in order that we can rise and become living images for others of the servant Lord himself.

To this understanding of the beatitudes and towards this end the prayers of this weekend's Mass put all of this succinctly. We pray that we will come to love God with all of our mind and love everyone else in truth of heart. At the Offertory we also pray that God be pleased to receive the offering of our service, transforming these gifts and our Christian lives, too, into the very sacrament of our redemption, so that we then become the One we eat and drink. Surely this then is the aspiration and the goal

of each one of us who have placed our faith and our daily lives in the grace-filled hands of Christ.