

Fourth Sunday Per Annum (A)
January 29, 2017.

For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord – the remnant of Israel (Zeph. 3:12).

Our Gospel text is very familiar to us. The Beatitudes are sometimes referred to as the Charter of God's Kingdom, a *magna carta* of sorts given to us by Our Lord, who in the Gospel of St. Matthew is presented as the new Moses who gives us a new law. Like Moses who gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments; ten words that changed the world, Christ Our Lord gives His people ten invitations to perfect love; words that transform minds and hearts and by extension, sanctify the world with the presence of God. Jesus is not only the new Moses but God Himself who inscribes the Law of His Sacred Heart not on stone tablets but on the very hearts of His disciples. What we are given in the Beatitudes is more than negative commandments that forbid sin, as the first Decalogue largely was. The Beatitudes invite us to live the blessedness of God's own life of light and love and in the perfection of that life to experience already here on earth something of the life of Heaven. This is why it is said of the Beatitudes that they are *heaven in our hands*. While we keep the commandments, we live the Beatitudes.

Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. These words of introduction have a solemn tone to them, implying that something out of the ordinary is about to be communicated. This is surely the case. The text literally says, opening his mouth he began to teach them, saying....The words that follow are uttered by God Himself. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Mt. 12:34). The Beatitudes reveal to us the very Heart of God and they reveal a new logic as it were. The poor and those who mourn are blessed; and the meek inherit the earth; and man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4).

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Let us consider this beatitude and see how what Our Lord teaches us differs from the spirit of the world. The February issue of *National Geographic Magazine* includes an enlightening though disturbing article titled *Life after Loss* (February 2017, pp. 79-103) which discusses the plight of widows in certain cultures. In many cultures widows are vulnerable to abusive traditions, to poverty and social exclusion. In some of these cultures widows are blamed for the death of their husbands and are seen as portents of bad fortune. These brutal realities are far from what we read in the Epistle of James: *Religion that is pure and undefiled ... is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world* (1:27). How grateful we should be for the Gospel; and that Our Lord's followers, from the very first Apostles right down to us who follow Him today, have taken and continue to take at face value the words that come from the very Heart of God. The world exploits the weak and the vulnerable. Our Lord teaches us that the Kingdom belongs to such as these; and that in serving them we serve Him.

The Beatitudes invite us to make our own *the mind of Christ* (1 Cor. 2:16); and in so doing, to conform ourselves to the Heart of Jesus. In the course of His preaching Our Lord will later draw attention to the absolute necessity of the first and the third beatitude. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I*

am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt. 11:29-30). Humility and gentleness are always the hallmark of the faithful disciple of Christ. Whatever our state in life, we should always be humble before God one another; and always gentle in our dealings with one another.

It is evident that what Our Lord calls us to imitate can neither be legislated as the Ten Commandments are, nor imposed; yet the Beatitudes propose everything because they invite us to mold our minds and hearts according to the mind and heart of God Himself. Good character cannot be forced on people. This is no less the case in society. Good character must be formed and for this to take place, one needs good models. An awareness of the importance of good character puts an obligation on us who are older to provide the younger members of our community with a good example. Our common desire and effort to follow Our Lord by heeding His counsels fashions us into *a people humble and lowly...[who] seek refuge in the name of the Lord – the remnant of Israel* (Zeph. 3:12). The blessedness of those whose lives are governed by God's logic and His own inner life of beatitude are imbued with a joy that is altogether different from the happiness that comes with even with an abundance of the world's goods. It is not difficult to be tempted by passing things or to base our security on them alone. This is why Our Lord repeatedly warns us about the dangers posed by the world: *For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?* (Mt. 16:26).

The Beatitudes invite us to tread the path that Our Lord Himself became for us for He Himself tread this path; and through His example we are strengthened and encouraged to live as He did. The Beatitudes are the means by which we are sanctified and conformed to Our Lord, and as we mature in our discipleship a time must come for all of us when we assent to the truth of Our Lord's words and we begin to live by this new logic. Only when this has taken place and we continue to conform ourselves to Our Lord's Heart and like Him, *offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God*; this being our *true and proper worship*. So we do not conform ourselves to *the pattern of this world* but are transformed by the renewing of our mind (Cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

What is this renewing of our mind? The renewal of our mind is brought about when we listen to Our Lord's word of truth and allow this word to take root in our minds and hearts. This is what we have done today. We have listened to this word; and now, *formed by divine teaching*, we unite the offering of *our bodies as a living sacrifice* to the Sacrament of our redemption for the world's salvation; that the communion it effects may truly make us *a people humble and lowly [who] seek refuge in the name of the Lord – the remnant of Israel* (Zeph. 3:12). For it would seem that *at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace* (Rom. 11:5). In His mercy may God grant us the courage and strength to persevere in His grace.