

The Spirit of the Beatitudes

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lk 6:17, 20-26

Ave Maria Catholic Church, February 13, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

The gospel of Saint Luke tells us the story: Jesus went out onto a mountain to pray, and He passed through the whole night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called his disciples and He chose from them twelve, whom He named the Apostles, and coming down with them He stood on a plane or flat surface, where there was a great multitude, (Lk. 6: 12).

The mount of the Beatitudes is a hill, about 500 feet high, on the western shore of Lake Tiberias. Jesus does not preach the sermon on the very top of the hill, but somewhat further down on a level place. In this action, we see Jesus, the Son of God, who comes down from the heights to teach us and to show us the way to the Father.

He comes down from the heights to heal our diseases and cleanse our souls. He comes down from the heights, but we should go up to encounter Him, as did that multitude of people. The prophet Isaiah invites us: *“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths,”* (Is 2:3).

The gospel relates that Jesus, raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: *Blessed are you who are poor, who are now hungry, who are now weeping, blessed are you when people hate you, exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.”*

Jesus stands now with the Twelve around Him, like a King, like a Commander, like a Master. Like a King, He proclaims the titles of honor that his kingdom possesses. Like a Commander, He points out his plan of battle. Like a Master, He teaches the meaning of true happiness. The beatitudes are Jesus’s titles of honor, His plan of battle, and the source of all our joy.

The word “beatitude” comes from the Greek word “*makarios*” which means blessed or happy, and from the Latin word “*Beatus-beati*.”

In the Old Testament, this expression “blessed” is found in at least 45 different passages. These passages usually praise the man who enjoys God’s friendship. At times, they mention God’s initiative in our salvation: Psalm 32 says *“Happy is he whose fault is taken away.”* At other times, they address the response that a man should give to God: *“Happy are they who observe what is right,”* (Psalm 106).

Also, the prophet Jeremiah 17: 7 – 8 says: *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,”* and *Psalms 1: 1-4*, indicates: *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night.”*

The New Testament contains 37 beatitudes. The most important beatitudes in the New Testament are the 2 large collections in Mt 5:3-12, and in Lk 6,20-26, where they introduce the Sermon on the Mount. Beatitude properly speaking is the state of blessedness achieved in the vision of God. Properly speaking, blessed are those who enjoy the full possession of the only truly perfect good: God. And that is heaven!

Now, the beatitudes are also like the description of a soul living under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the beatitudes are the highest acts of virtue that can be accomplished in this life by the person in whom the gifts of the Holy Spirit are predominate.

In the beatitudes Jesus explains to us where true virtue is found and where true happiness dwells. In other words, Jesus comes down from the top of the Mount, from that conversation with the Father in prayer, to show us the path towards blessedness.

The themes of the beatitudes are the most unexpected, the most unheard-of themes in the history of humanity. Until then, all men were alike in proclaiming the blessedness of the man with good fortune; the man who was satisfied with many possessions, the man who was honored and esteemed. But Jesus announces that true happiness is found in misfortunes, weaknesses, and trials.

The beatitudes ask for a “change of mind” and a “change of heart” that not only lead us to an encounter with Jesus, but also make our lives more like his. The beatitudes are the perfect description of Jesus and of how we should be as followers of Christ.

Jesus explains the blessed path that leads to the top. And the blessed path is Christ Himself, because in each beatitude Christ Himself is found. Jesus himself is poor in spirit, gentle, and merciful. He himself is pure of heart. He himself knew life's pains and sufferings. He himself was hungry and thirsty for a greater justice. He himself was persecuted for justice: He went so far as to suffer the passion and death on the Cross. Christ shows us the path towards perfect happiness, and He is that path. If He came down from the Father, He can bring us back to the Father.

Sometimes, we want to picture Jesus in the way we would wish him to be: we remember his fascinating parables full of mysteries, the miracles of healing, the multiplication of bread, the miraculous catch of fish, the change of water into wine, the transfiguration on Mount Tabor. But we erase from our memories the fact that He invites us to take up our daily crosses and follow him to Mount Calvary. We look forward to being with the Risen Lord, but we forget that if we want to rise, we first must die.

The Mount of the beatitudes has the same shape of Mount Calvary. The beatitudes challenge us by showing us Christ Crucified as our Model to contemplate and imitate.

In the beatitudes we find the foolishness of the Cross, or as Saint Paul says, the foolishness of God that is wiser than men, (1 Cor 1:23.25). This foolishness consists in living the “more” and the “above”: where all equilibrium and all calculation ceases.

This foolishness begins when there is no longer counting, calculating, weighing, nor measuring. Do you only love the one who loves you? Do you only give to the one who can return it to you? Do you only do favors to those who thank you? How great is all that? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Mt 5:47).

The foolishness of the cross consists in living the beatitudes. Blessed be the fools for Christ! They will be pushed around, laughed at, and considered awkward, slow, and even mentally weak. Theirs is the Kingdom of God. Blessed be these fools for Christ! No wisdom of the world will ever be able to deceive them. Then, in their foolishness, they bless those who curse them and repay no one evil for evil (Rom 12:17).

The world says: “Look at the fools! They are stoned and they kiss the hands of those who stone them. They are laughed at and made fun of, and they laugh like children. They are beaten, persecuted, and martyred, but they give thanks to God who found them worthy because the foolishness of the cross makes them truly wise.

Let us listen to the prophet Isaiah’s invitation: “*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...*” (Is 2:3) Come, let us climb the Mount of the beatitudes and Jesus will teach us his ways. Then, he will lead us to the Mount of Calvary where we will be crucified with him. But he will also bring us to the Mount Tabor where he explains to us that all the sufferings of the present life have no comparison with the glory to be revealed.

The Second Vatican Council teaches: “*The world can neither be transfigured nor offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes.*” (Lumen Gentium 31 § 2). Let us desire to be truly blessed, let us look for true happiness; then, let us go the mountain of the Lord, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths, Amen.