

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Dignity of Man

Today's Gospel presents the Beatitudes the way they are framed by St. Luke. They are quite different than the Beatitudes as found in the *Gospel of Matthew*. Everything about them is different. Even the setting. In the *Gospel of Matthew* Jesus climbs a hill and delivers the Sermon on the Mount. His introduction is the eight beatitudes we may have memorized as children. The *Gospel of Matthew* is written for Jewish Christians. It speaks about the new attitudes, the new mind set necessary for the Kingdom of the Lord. The heart must be pure, the Spirit must be poor, those who mourn the plight of Israel fallen from God will be comforted, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will receive the Kingdom of Heaven. There must be a transformation from the Old Testament mentality to a new life, a New Testament, a new Kingdom. Just following the law was no longer enough. The Beatitudes in the *Gospel of Matthew* present some of the fundamental changes that the ancient Jews must make to become Christians.

The *Gospel of Luke* is quite different from *Matthew*. It was written by a gentile convert, Luke, and addressed primarily to gentile converts to Christianity. Luke's audience was poor. Many were slaves or low born. Their choice of Christianity only exacerbated their situation. They were persecuted and suffering. In presenting the Lord's words to them, Luke places Jesus on a plain. He was on a level with them. He was poor, suffering and persecuted.

Only four Beatitudes are presented. They don't have to do with attitudes. They point to the present condition of the poor gentile Christian. "Blessed are you who are poor now. Blessed are you who are hungry, now. Blessed are you who are weeping now. Blessed are you who are ostracized now." Closer to the ancient beatitude form than Matthew, Luke also presents the antitheses, "Woe to you whose consolation is in your riches. Woe to you who are filled while others go hungry. Woe to you who laugh while others cry. Woe to you who are flattered by those who really do not respect you."

What is the difference between the people who Luke calls "Blessed" and those to whom he says, "Woe?" Those who are blessed have put their trust in God instead of in the world. Those to whom he says, "Woe" have found their joy in the material without even considering the spiritual. "Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD." Jeremiah prophesies in this Sunday's first reading.

Our brilliant, late Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul II, made the dignity of the human person the center of his teaching. Time and time again he stated that the human person only begins to reach his or her potential when he or she allows himself or herself to be the spiritual person God created. To be this person, the man or woman must reach out to Jesus Christ. Following the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II emphasized that "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear."

The mystery of man. We all have so many questions. Who are we? What do we want? Why are we here? What make life worth living? How can it be that each one of us, one among billions, can be significant? What possible good can be found in suffering, in death? The answer to each of these questions can only be found in the context of our sharing in the mystery of Jesus. Our dignity as human beings comes from him. His life flows through us allowing us to be both physical and spiritual.

Who are we? We are the People of God.

What do we want? We want to increase his life within us, and among us. We want to bring his life to those who do not possess him.

Why are we here? *To know him, to love him and to serve him* the old Baltimore catechism once told us. To deepen his presence in the world by providing a unique reflection of his love, a more profound Christian anthropology reveals.

And what could possibly make us think that each one of us, one among billions could make any impact upon the world? The power of the spiritual, the power of Christ working in each of us is a greater force than the world had ever experienced. Listen to what Luke tells his supposedly poor, lowly, and insignificant audience. He quotes Jesus as saying, "Among those born of women, no one is greater than John (the Baptist); yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." St. Theresa of Liseaux, St. Theresa of Calcutta, a sickly young girl and a small, little, old lady. Insignificant? Hardly. With the power of Christ, the Holy Spirit, they made an impact on the world. How about us here? A mom, a dad, a Christian, reaching out to bring the presence of the Lord to a child, a friend, a stranger. Insignificant. Hardly. If others have experienced Christ through any of us, then the power of God will transform them. The world is better every time a person allows God into his or her life. With our sharing in the power of God, how can any of us be insignificant?

What possible good can be found in suffering, in death? For the Christian, the value of suffering is found in union with Christ on the Cross. For the Christian the joy of death is union with Christ in paradise. For the world, the suffering Christian brings another experience of a person turning his or her pain into a prayer for others. For the world, the dying Christian presents another experience of a person taking true wealth with him or her at death.

The beatitudes in the *Gospel of Luke* are eminently practical. They recognize our human condition but tell us that despite our insignificance in the eyes of the world, when we allow the Person of Jesus Christ to reign our lives, our lives have infinite value. The theme of the *Gospel of Luke* is expressed in Mary's Magnificat: the lowly have been raised up.

You and I have been raised up.

You and I have meaning.

You and I have Jesus.