Homily for the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary time 2026 Year A

The Gospel today tells us the story of the Sermon on the Mount and Christ preaching to His followers the Beatitudes, literally the 'happy attitudes' that they should adopt as a way of life, attitudes that will guarantee them happiness.

Paintings of the Sermon on the Mount always depict Christ's audience as rapt in attention at the words falling from His lips. One is led to believe that they all went away resigned to obediently adopt these attitudes as a way of life. Well I wonder, because some of those things were pretty hard and radical to hear for the first time. At the very least there must have been some heated debate and argument as to what Christ could possibly mean, and there must have been some who disappointedly turned away and said, "Sorry, I can't be like that, it is asking too much", or even, "it is too harmful", or "it is too dangerous". If you want a more telling illustration, just imagine those of you who are parents, taking aside your young teenage son or daughter and outlining these Beatitudes as a good way of life to them, a way that will make them happy. I am sure you would think twice about it, because in this day and age, to choose to live such a vulnerable existence would leave them exposed to exploitation and hurt. People would perceive them as weak and open to manipulation; they would be used and abused and who would want that for their child?

Let us look at these Beatitudes again. First of all in Jesus's words, and then perhaps in more modern words that would make them more acceptable and attractive as a way of life, because everything about the Sermon on the Mount marks it out as important to Christ and crucial to those who would follow Him. It is not to be taken lightly nor dismissed casually.

So Christ's words first, and then a parent's advice to their child, in the same spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

You will learn as you grow older that certain things can come between God and yourself. One of these is the burden of wealth; the illusion that more and more of something, be it material or spiritual will bring happiness. It will not. Learn to travel light, learn the level of what is sufficient for your legitimate needs, and this will free your heart for God.

Happy the gentle for they shall have the Earth for their heritage.

Gentleness is a lovely thing and a very attractive attribute in a person. True gentleness is not a sign of weakness or sentimentality, it is a sign of the level of your strength. Only the truly strong person, confident and secure in themselves, can risk being gentle. Try in life to be gentle in your dealings with others, and sometimes too with yourself, and you will find that it will bring enormous rewards.

Happy those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

There will be times in your life when you will have to bear the burden of disappointment, sadness, or the pain of a broken heart. Those are the times when you will need consoling, and there will always be people around you whose love and care for you will be a source of warmth and comfort. But if you make the mistake of locking up your true feelings and denying your needs as a sign of strength and maturity, then at the same time you are denying yourself the love and the comfort that is available around you. You do not have to bear it all by yourself. Your show of stoicism and strength will inhibit and deter the comfort other people will want to give you. In times when you really need comfort, trust that in expressing your needs, you will allow others to offer all the comforts they want to give.

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for what is right, for they shall be satisfied.

There will be many times in your life when you will have to make choices and decisions, especially in the area of morality and ethics. You will have to make the choice between good and bad, right and wrong. It is not always easy, and sometimes you will make the wrong choice. You may choose the bad thing thinking it will bring you happiness and satisfaction. Only experience will show you that that is never the case. True happiness, deep contentment, or peace of mind is a pearl of great price. When you want that badly enough the day will come when you will have learnt the moral courage to make the right choices, no matter how hard they are, rather than live with the pain and disappointment that the wrong choice always brings.

Happy the merciful for they shall have mercy shown to them.

We will all make mistakes in life, actions that will fracture the loving relationship we have with God. There will be times when we will feel a deep

need to be forgiven and to be welcomed back into that loving relationship. Not only to be forgiven, but to know and feel that we are forgiven, and to be able to forgive ourselves. There is only one thing harder, and that is to forgive someone else, especially if that person has deeply hurt us. God has no problem in forgiving us, but he cannot and will not forgive us if we cannot or will not forgive others.

Happy the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Try if you can in your life, to work towards purity and clarity of heart. This is not a sexual thing, but rather it is a clear sightedness and a clear mindedness that has the courage to look at things clearly and see them as they really are, and not as we wish them to be. It is to try and always love and live in the truth, and cut out all the subtle mind games, devious excuses, and distortions that we are all capable of. God lies behind all truth and if our vision is strong enough to see truth, then it is clear enough to see God.

Happy the peacemakers for they shall be called 'Sons of God'.

Be a peacemaker in your life because without peace a good life is not possible. Peace is not a negative, or passive thing. It is not unity or just the absence of war or discord. True peace has to be worked at, built upon and constantly renewed. The right foundations must be there. Virtues like love and justice have to abound in our lives, and the lives of others, in communities and between nations. We draw closer to God the more we establish in our lives the attributes and the qualities of God.

Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The gift of life is a wonderful thing, but it is so short, and it goes by so quickly. Live it to the full. Part of living it to the full is to have structure, values, standards, and beliefs that will enrich and give meaning not only to your life, but to all the other lives that you interact with. It is a shock to discover that not everyone will share your standards and beliefs. They will mock them; they will challenge them; you may even have to suffer and bear witness to those beliefs. You may even feel that you are the only person in the world who still has those beliefs and standards. Hang on and persevere because an unchallenged life is only half a life. A follower of Christ must be prepared for the shadow and the burdens of the Cross in that life.

So you see what Christ is really saying to us in the Beatitudes is that our lives can be profoundly happy if they are grounded in simplicity, modesty and peace. Our lives are enriched and given value and meaning by fidelity to the principles and standards that we see as truth. This will not only impart happiness in this life, but it is also a pledge and a guarantee for the eternal life to come.

Put like that, it is pretty good advice.