

Liturgy of the Word with Children
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
29 January, 2023
Matthew 5:1-12

Catechist Background

This gospel reading is familiar to many people. In addition to being a popular choice for weddings and funerals, it is the gospel read each year on All Saints Day. It begins Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which follows in a respectable tradition of ancient revelations from God happening on mountaintops (Moses received the Commandments on Mount Sinai, the Greeks believed their gods lived on Mount Olympus).

The beatitude format ('Blessed/Happy are they who...they shall...') is a popular mode of scriptural expression, and is particularly plentiful in the Psalms. Jesus' beatitudes are slightly more controversial, however, as he calls 'blessed' those people who were often seen as less-than in first century culture, as well as today. He emphasises that what God values and what human cultures value are not always the same thing. Some of the beatitudes are present-oriented (...theirs IS the Kingdom of Heaven) and some are future-oriented (...they SHALL be satisfied), indicating that those who follow these beatitudes are reaping the fruits of their attitudes now and will continue to do so even more in time to come.

In the first beatitude, Jesus introduces the topic that he spends more time talking about in the scriptures than any other: The Kingdom of God (or Heaven). In Matthew's Gospel, written for a Jewish audience, it is referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven, as Jews would avoid saying 'God' out of respect for God's other-ness. Similarly, a literary device is employed to avoid using God's name when, for instance, it reads, 'They shall be comforted,' rather than 'God will comfort them.' The implied meaning would have been clear to the first hearers.

Setting the Scene

For the activity described below, you will need to have the beatitudes written individually on posters, with space underneath for further writing or drawing.

We Say Sorry

Leader: As we prepare to hear God's words to us, we remember there are times when we get our lives all in a muddle.

You came to teach us, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: You comfort those who mourn, Christ have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: You ask us to be merciful as you are merciful, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

We Pray (1)

God, help us to love you with our whole hearts and to love all people as you love them.
Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

- Who would like to be happy all the time?
- What does Jesus say will make people happy? Does that seem a little backwards to you?
- Show a selection of magazine advertisements to the children, and explore what the ads suggest will make people happy. Are the advertisers telling the truth?
- Did anyone get the one thing that they really, REALLY wanted for Christmas last month? Have they been completely and totally happy since then? Why not?
- What other sorts of ideas do we sometimes get in our heads that will make us happy that don't always work out the way we planned? (Ideas may include being better than the sportiest child at football—if he is off with chickenpox, we may be better than him, but it might not feel very good. Or having a certain person as a best friend—if we have been rude to someone else along the way, it might not be as nice as we expected.)

Response

Divide the group into smaller groups of about 4 each and give them a pre-prepared poster with a beatitude written with the 'Blessed are they' part on the left side of the paper and the 'They shall...' part on the right. If you do not have a large number of children, use the beatitudes that you think will be most pertinent. Get the children to think about *why* Jesus said some of these backwards sounding things. For instance, in 'Happy the merciful,' people who are merciful will naturally be happier with themselves than people who are bossy or nasty or bullies. The children may write/draw on the poster if it helps them to keep their attention focussed. Give each group an opportunity to share with the others when they are finished.

Younger children will need more support from the leaders in this activity. Older children can be asked what they think Jesus would have said if he was speaking today—what beatitudes are especially pertinent in the 21st Century?

We Believe

Relating to the creed what you have shared with the children, ask this series of questions and invite the children to reply, 'I do.'

- Do you believe in God who has made us to be peaceful children of God?
- Do you believe in Jesus the Son who came to call us back to the kingdom of heaven?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who is with us and helping us to live as we should?

We Pray (2)

Again, try to relate the bidding prayers to the reading by saying,
'We trust that you want us and the whole world to be happy and so we now pray...'

Leader: We pray for missionaries and people who are mistreated for speaking about Jesus. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for judges and people who make important decisions. May they use Jesus' wisdom to guide their judgements. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for those people who are made fun of because they are different from other people. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for anyone in our neighbourhood who is feeling unhappy for any reason. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Lord, help us to share the happiness you give us with those we see every day. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

