

5th Sunday (A)

9th February 2020

'Sermon on the Mount II: Beatitudes +'

Is 58: *Then will your light shine like the dawn.*
1Cor 2: *the only knowledge I
claimed to have was of Christ crucified.*

Mt 5:1–16: The Beatitudes ++

Why have I chosen today to add together the Gospel reading that we missed last Sunday to the one allocated to this Sunday? Well, since Our Lord's 'Sermon on the Mount' is such an important body of teaching, it seems strange not to have heard its opening verses, especially as they are so majestic, and challenging: the 'Beatitudes.' Especially as it's the 'Year of the Word,' and as many of you have happily taken the pocket copies of St Matthew's Gospel to read, I think it's good to have an overview of this Gospel.

In brief, then, Mt 1–2, covers the lead-up to the conception of Jesus, and then birth at Bethlehem, and the visit of the Magi. Mt 3–4 covers the baptism ministry of John the Baptist, leading up to Our Lord's own Baptism, and then his temptations in the desert and the outset of His own public life by Lake Galilee, as we heard 2 wks ago. Then, Mt 5–7 bring together a huge range of Jesus's teaching — this is what is known as the 'Sermon on the

Mount,' and is commemorated nowadays at a tranquil spot on the hillside above Capernaum, overlooking Lake Galilee. Mt 5–7 is such an important text, that the Church offers us excerpts from it over the course of 6 Sundays (OT wks 4–9) in 'Year A,' but some of those Sundays will often be lost once Lent begins, and there is the 3-month wait to resume Ordinary Time again in about mid-June. At least, with the availability of your slim Gospels, you can make sure that you have read and pondered the whole of the Sermon on the Mount at some point, and won't miss a single word of Our Lord's blessed message.

'The Beatitudes' launch the Sermon on the Mount,' and whilst they are words very familiar to us, yet their power is never diminished. They are the Word of God, the holy Word of the Son of God Himself ... so we cannot dismiss them as exaggerated, too idealistic, beyond us, ... Just the opposite: we need to listen carefully to these encouragements, to measure our lives against them, take them seriously, and apply them with loving commitment.

The Beatitudes, one might say, are Jesus's *agenda* for

living a good Christian life, and so they should be attitudes that are never far from our consciences. Whether one reads them as “Blessed are those who ...” or “How happy are those who ...” makes no real difference — the essence is the same: a good Christian life requires us to be **“poor in spirit ... gentle ... merciful ... pure in spirit ...”; it means that we must be someone willing to “mourn ... hunger and thirst for righteousness ... [and be a] peacemaker.” Every single one of those demands takes a lifetime of decision, of diligence, and of practice. They do not always come easily. We can lazily be people who cause arguments, shrug off those who are sad, and turn a blind eye to wrongdoing ... but it is a far, far happier thing to make the Christian effort, hear and heed the Word of God, strive to do that which Jesus actually asks of us: to be ... ** ...

How are we going to weigh this up in our lives, and seek the inspiration we need to live up to the Beatitudes? Can our lives be turned around by hearing them once here at Mass in the course of a couple of minutes? No, I suspect not. It’s more likely that we need far longer, a quiet space

alone, a chance really to ponder the depth of Jesus’s message and set of challenges in this text. So, this is exactly where the advantage of having that pocket edition of St Matthew’s Gospel comes in. However, and whenever, you choose to read it — quickly, slowly, this month, next month, Lent, or sooner — when it gets to passages like Mt 5:1–12, slow down, read and re-read, pause and ponder, pray and ask yourself, “What does the Lord ask of me, here? ... What does He want to press me to take in, and take on? ... What does He want me to do, or to change?”

In fact, in many regards, this is how we should read the entire Gospel, prayerfully and openly, with a view to how the Lord can change us when His Spirit speaks to us through the sacred page. It is the Lord’s own work, a work of reforming us and of making us holy, little by little, as we enter more deeply and more lovingly into His Gospel. What we have to do is to dispose ourselves to hear His prompting, and reading His Word, in quiet prayer, is the ideal setting. Please God ‘the Beatitudes’ might come alive for us, this year, as never before, and help us to live them in the Spirit!