

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Matthew 5:1-12a

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 29, 2023



REFLECTION

Some of the beatitudes are familiar and widely celebrated, but the first two, poverty of spirit and meekness, are often misunderstood.

Poverty of spirit is the opposite of entitlement. The person who is poor in spirit knows that everything they have comes from God. Because they aren't clinging to anything, the poor in spirit have their hands open to receive all of God's gifts and their hearts open to see the kingdom of God in our midst.

What about meekness? Before a horse could be ridden into battle or taken out to work a field, it had to be "meeked" to be steady and unflappable. The meek person is disciplined and not easily distracted or spooked from their course, even when it is difficult. The meek can feel fear, anger, or grief without being pushed around by them. Jesus was meek (Matthew 11:29). He is our model of all the beatitudes!



ACTION

Whether we are passionate about planting seeds of peace or are "hungering" for righteousness and justice to be done, the first step is to embrace meekness and listen to one another without defensiveness. Practice listening to the story of someone very different from you. Use reflective listening: Rather than responding immediately to what you think the other person is saying, rephrase what you hear and ask the other person whether you have understood them correctly. Listening, even when it makes us uncomfortable, gives us the insight to find just solutions and create greater understanding for all people.



Check out this article from LifeTeen, "10 Steps to Becoming a Better Listener": <https://lifeteen.com/blog/10-steps-becoming-better-listener/>

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Can you think of any examples of meekness in action? What does it look like when someone perseveres without flinching?
- ❖ Do you find the beatitudes comforting or challenging? What comforts or challenges you most?



January 29, 2023

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #70A

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

Psalms 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Matthew 5:1-12a

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

The teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount begin with the beatitudes. In Latin, *beatitudo* means being both "happy" and "blessed," words that are usually used to recognize how good things are for someone, like #blessed on social media. Whether we're talking about back then or right now, there is a stark contrast between what Jesus says is blessed and what society considers desirable. That contrast prompts us to ask ourselves: Do we want what the world wants? Or do we want what God wants? Embodying these characteristics brings us closer to the kingdom of God. There is a moral invitation within each beatitude to unpack and apply to daily life, which leads us farther along the path of discipleship and holiness.

Q FOCUS: *The beatitudes are characteristics of Christian discipleship.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord occurs forty days after the birth of Jesus, on February 2. Even though Mary and Joseph knew they held the Christ child, even though Mary was in no need of purification from sin, they didn't put themselves above the law. They consecrated their firstborn to the Lord and offered the prescribed sacrifice for purification and expiation of sin (Luke 2:22-24). It was here that Simeon recognized Jesus as the light to the nations (see Luke 2:29-32 for Simeon's

prayer). This reference to light is why this feast is also called Candlemas, and became the day that the Church blesses all the candles which will be used that year.

Church Teaching Connection

"Although Jesus' words may strike us as poetic, they clearly run counter to the way things are usually done in our world. Even if we find Jesus' message attractive, the world pushes us towards another way of living. The beatitudes are in no way trite or undemanding, quite the opposite. We can only practice them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and our pride" (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 65).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 5:1-12a

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, / for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. / Blessed are they who mourn, / for they will be comforted. / Blessed are the meek, / for they will inherit the land. / Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, / for they will be satisfied. /

Blessed are the merciful, / for they will be shown mercy. / Blessed are the clean of heart, / for they will see God. / Blessed are the peacemakers, / for they will be called children of God. / Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, / for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. / Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you / and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. / Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

► **If a teacher assigned an essay, what standards for length, structure, and formatting are generally expected?**

Just as you know what to expect in a five-paragraph essay, the Gospel of Matthew is structured with five major discourses, just like the Torah (Hebrew for "the Law"), which constitutes the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The first of those discourses, found in Matthew 5–7, is called the Sermon on the Mount, and begins with today's Gospel on the beatitudes. Whereas Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, Jesus went up the mountain not to receive the Law, but to teach it.

► **What did Jesus teach (i.e., some key themes or messages)?**

Jesus begins his teaching with the beatitudes, telling us about things people usually don't think of as positive situations, like being poor and being persecuted, and affirms them as blessed characteristics of true discipleship. People usually use "blessed" to recognize some good fortune (as opposed to being cursed with suffering). Put another way, people

mistakenly think that good fortune means God favors us, whereas in suffering, God abandons us. However, Jesus tells us that these are actually desirable characteristics in the kingdom of God. Even if the world does not value these ways of being, God does.

► **If the beatitudes are a reversal of values, what are some examples of that contrast between the world's standards versus what God values?**

Each of the beatitudes provides encouragement to those who struggle and identifies characteristics of discipleship. Let's look more closely at each one.

One who is poor in spirit completely depends on God.

One who mourns is aware that things are not as they should be and trusts God to bring healing and wholeness.

One who is meek in the face of conflict confidently relies on God to make things right.

One who hungers and thirsts for righteousness longs for the goodness and justice of God.

One who is merciful imitates God's generous love and forgiveness.

One with a clean heart is pure and earnest in their inner love of God and their external actions.

A peacemaker seeks unity, harmony, and reconciliation with others and God.

One who is persecuted for the sake of righteousness pursues God's goodness and truth, even when it's hard.

► **Which beatitude best reflects how you try to live your life? Which poses the greatest challenge for you?**

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 116.

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by teaching us the beatitudes.

The beatitudes contrast standard social priorities with the values of God.

Each beatitude is a characteristic of true discipleship.

Act on the Word

Do This, Not That

For this activity, you will need to print copies of select paragraphs (chapter 3, paragraphs 63–94) of *Gaudete et exsultate*, available online through the Vatican’s website, and provide markers and poster board.

Continuing the discussion on the universal call to holiness and discipleship from last week, expand the exploration of *Gaudete et exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad) by focusing on the paragraphs 63–94, which Pope Francis dedicated to the beatitudes. Begin by reading introductory paragraphs 63–66 together. Draw attention to how the words of Jesus in the beatitudes are quite the opposite of the world’s view. In paragraphs 67–94, Pope Francis discusses how each beatitude calls us to go against the flow, as if to say: “Do this, not that.”

Break the teens into eight groups, assigning one beatitude per group. Distribute poster board and markers to each group, directing them to draw a line down the center and write the label “Value This (Moral Virtue)” on one side, and “Not That (Social Standard)” on the other. Allow time for each group to read and discuss how their assigned beatitude is calling us to “do this, not that,” and create a poster displaying the group’s findings.

Note that Pope Francis switches the order slightly, putting “the meek” (Matthew 5:5) before “those who mourn” (Matthew 5:4). Here is a list of the paragraphs that correspond to each beatitude:

- ✳ Poor in Spirit is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 67–70.
- ✳ The Meek is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 71–74.

- ✳ Those Who Mourn is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 75–76.
- ✳ Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 77–79.
- ✳ The Merciful is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 80–82.
- ✳ The Pure in Heart is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 83–86.
- ✳ Peacemakers is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 87–89.
- ✳ Persecuted for Righteousness is in *Gaudete et exsultate*, 90–93.

As they finish and present to the large group, invite discussion on how the beatitudes both encourage and challenge us.

Closing Prayer

Blessed are you Lord, our God.

Yours is a reign of truth, peace, and justice.

May we, your disciples,

embody your values in this world

and welcome all people to a community of love.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus

Christ your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity

of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.1tp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.