

## **Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

The readings of today tell us how we can pattern our lives according to the divine invitation. They call us to reflect upon the many ways in which we can respond to God and give him our total attention. God communicates with us in many ways and he seeks a response from us. The whole church always strives to follow faithfully in the footsteps of Christ.

The Gospel of today directs us to a method in which we can respond to him. We have the Sermon on the Mount as presented by Matthew, which is the Christian ethical teaching and the core of the Christian way of life. Jesus gives us the Beatitudes in his sermon delivered from a Mountain and the Mountain in the Bible indicates a holy place where God is present. Here Jesus presents us with real opposing values, those of Jesus and the world. He teaches us that we can create happiness and the capacity for joy by ourselves and radiate them to others, to receive the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with a series of nine Beatitudes. Here Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses proclaiming the divine message to people. The Sermon on Mount is in fact the first of the five discourses of Jesus as given in Matthew's Gospel. This Sermon is a collection of sayings and teachings of Jesus focusing on the personal qualities expected of a disciple.

The Beatitudes have a quality and depth which goes far beyond the mere moral requirements of the Ten Commandments. They call for a very special relationship with God and with the people around us. They involve not merely a personal observance of some ethical rules but a deep concern to be involved in the building up of the world we live in, helping to make it a place of truth, love, compassion, justice, freedom and peace.

Beatitudes are much older than the gospel and can be found in the wisdom literature of the Bible in the Old Testament. Jesus uses Beatitudes to instill hope in people whose lives have given them little to hope for. This hope can be found in the very structure of each of

the Beatitudes. The first part of the Beatitude describes a serious condition of diminishment ranging from poverty to persecution. No doubt these conditions were real and people suffered greatly in each situation.

The good news is found in the second part of the Beatitude. This second part proclaims a future situation that will be reversal of the present. However, one can ask what that situation is which brings about a change. The fullness of the Kingdom of heaven will bring with it the reversal of the current state of diminishment and powerlessness. The radical change has already begun with the preaching and ministry of Jesus. Current reality is not the only reality, nor is it the fullness of reality.

Each of the Beatitude starts with the word 'blessed' which is sometimes translated 'happy'. However, it is more accurate to translate it as 'fortunate' meaning, persons who belong to the 'kingdom of heaven'. These describe a situation that exists when we live according to those values, namely of truth and love, of compassion and justice, of peace, freedom and sharing, qualities which emanate from God himself. Jesus says that blessed are those who are poor in spirit; that is those who are aware of their basic poverty and are in need of help and support of God. The poor in the Bible are not just the materially destitute but all those who in their need turn to God. Poor in spirit are those who clearly acknowledge that they depend totally on God.

We must remember that just as the Ten Commandments are the core of the Jewish way of life and a law to follow, so Beatitudes are the core of the Christian way of life. Yet, they are often not understood as such. In many ways, they are largely ignored as guides to Christian living and many Christians still regard the Ten Commandments as their life guide. They are the norms to be observed even without any inner feelings. The Beatitudes are not commandments, and they are not so much things to be done or rules to be kept as deep-down attitudes of mind. Their observance is only possible with a deep love of God and of other people. They can never be kept fully as they are goals that are always calling us further.