

'THE BEATITUDES' - HOMILY – 29 JANUARY 2017

We see something remarkable from a distance.
It is inspiring. It moves us to silence as we gaze upon it.
Maybe we just take it in, and never go any closer to it.
But if we have the opportunity to move nearer, it becomes breathtaking.
No words can capture its beauty and depth and size and colour.
The journey into it is full of wonder and surprise.
Some natural wonder in the world. Some experience of utter joy.

COULD WE PAUSE FOR A MOMENT AND HOLD THE MEMORY OF SUCH AN EXPERIENCE?

So many times each week, around the world, a particular passage of scripture strikes a chord within.
It is read at a wedding ceremony and yes, it says what we want to say about life.
It is read at a commissioning ceremony and it points to the way that we wish to live out this job or vocation or mission.
It is read at a funeral when we can't find the words for someone we love deeply or someone we admire and respect.
It is read in class liturgy.
It is read in a moment of stillness at the beach or park or by a river.
Today's Gospel of the Beatitudes has that power.

There is an incredible richness in the Beatitudes and many ways of approaching them.
Matthew and Luke have different versions and settings.
Today we reflect on the longer version in 'The Sermon on the Mount' in Matthew's Gospel.

FROM [AFAR](#) words such as these touch us:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted
Blessed are gentle (or blessed are the humble)
Blessed are the merciful
Blessed are pure in heart
Blessed are the peacemakers*

Maybe one of these promises is enough at this moment.

But if we choose to [TRAVEL CLOSER TO THE TEXT](#), to see its depth, it is inspiring.
The closer to it, the more we see.

THE DEPTH OF THE BEATITUDES

There are 2 stanzas of 4 beatitudes each, then a 9th beatitude.

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

We can see from the first and eighth beatitudes *“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”*. They are the bracket.
There are 2 stanzas. The 4th and 8th beatitudes speak of *“righteousness”*.

In the **first 4 beatitudes of the 1st stanza**, in the original Greek we have:

Hoi Ptochoi to pneumatic – the poor in spirit

Hoi Penthountes – the ones mourning

Hoi Praeis – the gentle (or meek or humble)

Hoi Peinontes kai dipsontes – the hungry and thirsting

Ptochoi, Penthountes, Praeis, and *Peinontes* all begin with the letter **“P”**.

The 5th to 8th beatitudes in the second stanza do not have key words with the same letter. Yet if you count the number of words in Greek in each stanza, it is the same. The 2 stanzas are carefully constructed.

The question then comes – why add **a ninth beatitude**?

Why bracket the eighth as though it is the end of the beatitudes?

By not being in stanzas, the 9th one is highlighted.

The first eight can be in times of suffering and persecution of the followers of Christ, Or in times of relative safety for us.

The ninth speaks to those suffering because they are followers of Jesus.

The 9th Beatitude reads:

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you

And utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad,

For your reward is great in heaven,

For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Some writers will speak of 8 beatitudes, and some speak of 9.

In Australia many might be tempted to choose the 1st 8 beatitudes only.

In our parish, as we hear life stories of our parish members from Iraq and Syria, We know how real the 9th Beatitude is for them, and for their extended families back there.

Or for someone who does not get a promotion at work in Brisbane because she is Christian.

Or an adult quietly saying grace before meals at a café and others make of fun of him.

Or a child ridiculed by other students for wearing a cross.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

[PAUSE AND REFLECT]

A little further, in Matthew 5:42 Jesus develops the 9th Beatitude further.

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”.

Say a peaceful prayer for someone who has hurt you.

Ask God to bless them.

AND WE ARE NEVER ALONE. WE ARE BLESSED.

Now we spend time peacefully before God with whatever beatitudes touch you within.
Reflecting on what it is like -

- **TO BE BLESSED BY GOD**
- **TO FEEL BLESSED BY GOD**
- **TO KNOW WITHIN THE BLESSING OF GOD**

As the Gospel unfolds, we learn more about the **kingdom of heaven**.
And we learn more about what it is to be **righteous** as a follower of Jesus.

In Chapter 6, we learn about the kingdom of heaven as Jesus teaches people how to pray.
"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth at it is in heaven" Matthew 6:10
In Chapter 13, we read several parables about what the kingdom is like.

If look up sports rankings,
We can see which nation or team or individual is number 1.
If we look up the national or state or local government Awards,
We can read about some impressive people and marvellous things they have done.

But when it comes to being "righteous" in the Beatitudes,
It is not a ranking or award or a prize a person receives.
It is not a competition where someone comes first or a scale where someone has a higher title.

IT IS LIVING THE BLESSING OF GOD

During 2017, as we listen and pray Sunday Gospel passages from Matthew's Gospel,
We will see in more depth, what it is to be righteous and blessed before God.

And whether we write a reflection on the Beatitudes from a particular experience,
Of adults, women and men,
Of youth,
Of children,
Of people with disabilities, of cultural minorities, of parish communities
Of Indigenous Spirituality
Of a Justice and Peace spirituality,
Or other life reflections,
We live out the mission, blessed by God.

**Whether gazing from afar,
Or close up to the beauty of the Beatitudes,
I INVITE YOU TO SPEND TIME THIS WEEK IN SILENCE WITH THE BEATITUDES
AND WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING BLESSED.**

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – The Beatitudes – 29 January 2017]
[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/012917.cfm>]
[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook29012017>]