

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Cycle A – 2008
Zephaniah 2:3,3:12-13; I Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 5:1-12

The Sermon on the Mount has been called the crown of the Gospels, the high point of the teaching of Jesus, the new law replacing the Ten Commandments, even Jesus' greatest sermon. The problem with all of these descriptions is that they themselves try to explain the beatitudes from a worldly perspective of greatness, when in reality the beatitudes are a teaching of Jesus that takes our ideas of greatness in this world and turns them upside down.

We see wealth and prosperity as great; Jesus says blessedness is found in not relying on material possessions but instead in having a poverty of spirit. On the other hand we see hunger and thirst as negative; Jesus sees them as opportunities to know God's blessings.

If I were to say one thing about the Sermon on the Mount I would say that it is the most studied word in the entire bible. Mountains of paper and gallons of ink and years of reflection have gone in to the study of, and explanation of, these words. This points to one very important thing about the beatitudes, they are Jesus' own words, and therefore they are absolutely true, for Jesus never spoke falsely. He only spoke the truth.

Therefore, if you want to understand Jesus, and the truth that he teaches, the beatitudes are an excellent starting point. Let me illustrate with just one beatitude – *"Blessed are they who mourn."* I choose this beatitude because it is the one that every one of us experiences at some time in life. The blessing we receive, when we mourn, is two-fold. First of all we receive the blessing of other people's goodness. When someone we know has lost a loved one, it is the most natural thing in the world to reach out to them. Many families become overwhelmed with the outpouring of care and concern given them at the time of death. So the blessedness is to see the fundamental goodness that is in everyone.

A second blessedness in mourning is that it forces us to stop what we are doing, if only for a short while. Living the American dream requires a whole lot of time and resources on our part. Death is an opportunity to reflect on our lives, to examine the choices we have made. Mourning plunges us to the depths of our souls, and it is only there that we will find God ever-present to be our strength and our comfort. So often, the hectic lives we live, or even the wrong choices we make, drive us so far away from God, that we don't even know we hunger for God. Grief plunges us to the depths of our souls to encounter once again our God who is always near us.

Now having said this, studying the rest of the beatitudes is your job. That is because today I must speak on another topic which is very important to our church; it is a topic which can be just as controversial and misunderstood as the beatitudes. It is a topic that gets us all where we live. I am talking about giving money to the church in general, and specifically giving to our annual God's Gift Appeal.

If you really think about, when we make the choice to give money to the church, or to any other charitable cause, we are really only giving back to God, what belongs to God to begin with. Everything on this earth is created by God. This includes everything that we have co-created with God. We have not done anything in this world on our own, but rather God has been with us every step of the way, whether we are willing to admit it or not.

Now, there are those individuals who have made a whole lot of money, by doing things contrary to God's way. All I can say is that God gave them the ability to do whatever they do, and they have chosen to do things contrary to God's will, and have become very rich in this world as a result of it. But in the end, there will be an accounting, and in Jesus' own words, "to those who have been given much, much will be expected, and to those who have been given little, what little they have will be taken away." In other words, when we leave this world, and all of its material things, this world is going to stay right here, and all that we have will be divided up amongst others. We will take with us only our souls, and the spiritual achievements we have attained in this life. Furthermore we will be held accountable for how we used, or misused God's gifts.

So, giving to the church, or other charitable causes, is simply giving back to God, what already belongs to God in the first place. But again, Jesus very clearly taught us, that whatever we give in faith, will be given back to us and more besides. And so we should have courage that even if we give a little bit more than we are comfortable giving, we will still have more than enough. We should be moved with a spirit of generosity, because we can never out-give God's generosity.

The monies that you entrust to the church are the resources that we use to continue to share the gospel of Jesus. Our parish monies are used for salaries for our staff who help to coordinate the many ministries offered in our parish; this includes our sacramental formation and celebrations; our Faith Formation for children through adults; our social justice outreach and programming; and the simple day to day operations of a parish of this size. This past week you received a copy of our annual income and expense report to help you to know how we have been good stewards of the monies you entrusted to us.

As Catholics we are also part of a universal church. This means our monetary support of the church cannot be limited to only our local parish. We are a part of something so much bigger than ourselves. We are a part of a universal church that spans the entire globe. This means we need to support the universal church as well as our parish. One way to do this is through the annual God's Gift Appeal. I don't need to go into the details and specifics of God's Gift because the diocese does an excellent job of informing you through The New Earth, and through letters and mailings directly to your home. If you say you don't know anything about the diocese it is because you simply haven't read what was sent you.

Giving to our church should not be seen as an obligation; neither should we give begrudgingly. Giving to our church is a privilege, because it becomes one more opportunity for God to bless us; one more opportunity for us to grow in our relationship with God as we entrust this part of our life to God. The measure with which we give, should also be a reflection of our lives. Those who have much ought to give much, because they have been entrusted with much. Those who have little should give a portion of that little, because God has given them what little they have.

So today, in this Eucharist, be fed by the body and blood of Christ, and remember all that God has done for you. Then ask God to help you answer the question, "What can I do in return to the Lord, for all that the Lord has done for me?"