

Our Gospel passage, Jesus' Beatitudes, is one of the most cherished parts of the New Testament. Most everyone loves them.

What's special about these eight teachings? They're where we see Jesus teaching us how to be happy.

The Beatitudes represent his program for finding joy. That word "blessed" means something like "how lucky you are." And that good fortune leads to your happiness.

On another occasion he told us, "I have come that your joy may be complete."

There are many times when Jesus gives us moral teachings. When he reinforces how we are to live. But today he's talking about joy. The Beatitudes lead to that.

"Blessed are the merciful." This gets at the very heart of who God is.

One of the qualities of God we see in the Old Testament comes with the Hebrew word *hesed*. *Hesed* means 'tender mercy.' The Bible speaks of God's tender mercy.

St. John wrote, "God is love." It's not just that God has love. God *is* love. God gives His love away. And since God does this, God is happy.

If we want to be happy, we should want to be like God, and we do this by giving our love away.

Blessed are the merciful. Reach out in compassion to another person, or many, in tender mercy. You'll find joy.

I think of a family I know very well. I met them in 2008. They were from Nigeria and new to my parish.

I met them because quite suddenly the husband began to attend our early morning daily Mass. Within a day or two I introduced myself and he told me that he was new in Worcester.

Very soon I learned how they got to America. They won an immigration lottery, enabling them to come here. But in order to come you had to have a sponsor over here, someone who agreed to help you with your expenses, see to your housing and food...at least until you got your feet on the ground.

So, he lined up a sponsor, a family friend from Nigeria, living in Atlanta. As soon as this couple arrived in Atlanta, this friend said, "Oh, sorry, there's nothing I can do for you. You must go someplace else. My mother lives in a place called Worcester, in Massachusetts. Take a bus there and see if she can help you."

Imagine arriving in this country with your wife, a few changes of clothing, maybe a few bucks in your pocket, and the first thing you hear is "Sorry, can't help." The next thing you know you're on a bus headed for Worcester in the winter.

I also learned that his wife was eight months pregnant and they were living in a total rat-hole downtown on Jacques Avenue. The single room they were in those first few weeks that winter had no heat and no hot water. This was the room in which their first child was to live.

Within a couple of hours after learning this, I mentioned it to a couple of friends, also daily Mass-goers. I didn't ask them for any help. I just mentioned it. Not two hours later, two different families, without my asking, offered to take them into their own homes, where there was heat and water, and lots of love. The plan was that they would move into one home for a few weeks until the child was born and then move to the other home where there was more room for at least a year.

And here's the point. These families were so happy to do this!

I gave this man some temporary work in my office at the Chancery.

Now, suddenly, our Chancery workers, unprompted, started getting things for them and especially for the soon-to-be-born baby. The St. Vincent de Paul Society and Problem Pregnancy, a pro-life organization, gave us a crib and Pampers and baby clothing.

What stands out in my memory, though, is the happiness of every one of those dozen or so folks who helped. They were never asked to help. They heard of the circumstances and offered. It "made their day" that they could provide for others.

For Christians it's just instinctual that you help. If you want to be happy, offer tender mercy to others.

That's just one Beatitude. The flip side of some of these teachings has to do with our addictions.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” This addresses our preoccupation with material things.

If you need a lot of ‘stuff’ in your life, if you’re attached to wealth, if you seek to be a money-maker...Jesus said, “rid yourself of this attachment.”

How blessed you are, how happy you are, if not you’re not addicted to ‘stuff.’

“Blessed are the meek.” Here, the Lord addresses our addiction to power, where power can become a consuming need. Happiness means letting go of my need for power.

“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you because of me.” Here Jesus speaks of our obsession with being liked, or when we crave esteem or look for titles. All the Lord wants is that we are faithful to him and speak the truth.

If you look at the lives of the saints...they were often not popular. They were thought by many to be fools and charlatans.

But they weren’t. When you’re not attached to titles, you can be very happy. Saints don’t look for titles.

Let’s pray that these Beatitudes become central in our lives.