



January 29, 2023

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Highly honorable are the poor in spirit..." Matthew 5:3



Dear Friends,

"Our world does not appreciate vulnerability. Neediness is rejected as incompetence; kindness is dismissed as unprofitable. We want a God who is almighty and invincible, a God who destroys evil in a flash and makes everything all right with a wave of his hand. We want a God who wakes us from our nightmares and transports us into a trouble-free world. And so, God's humility is not only frightening; it is also offensive.

We prefer the kind of God we can soar up to and glory in. We don't want to admit that our efforts to reach him are not only futile, but unworthy. God's descent means we cannot come up to him; it is he who comes down to us!"—Charles E Moore. (The Plough magazine) The good life, we are told, is about having it all together, moving up, being in first place; to know God, however, means the very opposite.

The ministry of the Prophet Jesus reveals to us what God is like. Today, in our passage from Matthew, Jesus begins a lengthy homily answering that question. Jesus begins with eight statements (we've named them the beatitudes) about what God values. The Greek word that our bibles translate as "blessed" could also be translated as "happy" or "fortunate" but in the cultural context might be expressed best as "highly honorable" or "greatly esteemed."

In Jesus's view honor and value are not determined by us. They are bestowed by God publicly for all to see. And the things that God considers worthy of recognition and praise are almost always the opposite of what we or any society may think. And how we imagine God conditions how we think about ourselves.

We use an imperial image of God to sanction the current political and economic systems. God the Divine Emperor, we believe, rewards those who have achieved material success. We falsely believe that the rich have merited all they have. The idea of merit is used to excuse our greed, prestige, and privilege that has left millions living on our streets, others without healthcare, or education, or meaningful employment, or beseech us at the border. We weaken human relationships by the idea that everything must be earned. Couples that keep tabulations on their partner's merits will not be together for long.

Jesus challenges our ideas of God and what and whom God values. In our beatitudes Jesus is holding up three main categories of esteemed behavior: being poor, mourning, and hungering. It is by the gift/grace of God that we are who we are. This can never be earned. It is a gift. If we think about it there is really very little we have achieved on our own. We owe a great debt to our families, teachers, culture, education, society, and more. Albert Einstein once said, *"I have all along been standing on the shoulders of giants."* This is the humility of the Beatitudes.

The gospels give us two images of God. They are images of vulnerability—a helpless baby placed in an animal's feed box, and an innocent man helplessly nailed to a cross. These are images that invite us to vulnerability. If we think about it what makes us loveable is not our power and strength but our vulnerability. The perfect are unapproachable because deep down we know we cannot approach perfection. We know someone loves us when they accept us even in our imperfections.

We cannot do it alone. We need the love and support of family, friends, and the community. Our weakness invites us to join in solidarity with others. It invites God's own vulnerable love. We are invited to become vulnerable to the needs of the poor, the sorrowful, and the hungering. In our willing meekness, God clothes us in the honors of the Kingdom. *"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."* (Matthew 5:12)

Peace,

Fr Ron

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