

## 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

### GOSPEL

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Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

'How happy are the poor in spirit;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy the gentle:

for they shall have the earth as their heritage.

Happy those who mourn:

they shall be comforted.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right:

they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful:

they shall have mercy shown them.

Happy the pure in heart:

they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers:

they shall be called children of God.

Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right:

theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.'

(Matthew 5:1-12)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- This collection of sayings is known as the 'Beatitudes', which means 'blessings'.
- This text is also known as the 'Sermon on the Mount'. Luke also has a version of this text, but his account is set on a plain by the Sea of Galilee (Luke 6:20-26). Compare the two versions.
- Just as Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai, Matthew situates Jesus on a mountain as he gives the new law.
- There are a number of instances in his gospel where Matthew parallels Jesus with Moses. Again, this may be to appeal to the largely Jewish audience of his own community.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

The rendering of the Greek term used in this text as 'happy' is rather weak. A better term is 'blessed'. At the heart of the Beatitudes is Jesus' instruction to his followers to cultivate certain qualities in their lives. To be gentle, to mourn, to thirst for what is right, to be merciful, to be pure of heart and to be peacemakers are signs of the presence of the kingdom of God in our lives. To have such virtues is to be blessed. Jesus teaches that those who suffer some human lack or pain are blessed, not because poverty, pain or sorrow are good in themselves, but because they reveal to us our need for God. Those who are prosperous, comfortable or content find this much more difficult to realise and accept.

The final portion of this text speaks to the experience of the early church, which suffered persecution for the sake of faith in Jesus Christ. Christians today are also called to stand against arrogant secularism, which proclaims that humans do not need God. Even today, people suffer for their faith, but they too are assured that their reward will be great in heaven!

- Recall a time of suffering and sorrow in your life. What was God saying to you at that time? How did such an experience influence the person you are today?
- Describe someone you know who embodies one of the Beatitudes.

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Who do you know who is 'poor in spirit', 'gentle', a 'peacemaker', 'merciful', 'pure in heart'? How are these qualities manifested?
- Pray for those people this week.
- This gospel presents a surprising teaching on the source of happiness. Recall a time when you experienced complete happiness and joy. What was the source of that happiness? Compare this with what the media and advertising present as sources of happiness in today's society.
- Live the Beatitudes as consciously as possible this week.
- Read and reflect on the Beatitudes this week. Can you write one for yourself?

