

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 1, 2026

Lectionary Readings:

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13
1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Matthew 5:1-12a

Safety can be found only in humility and justice.
God chooses the lowly to show forth his power.
Righteousness comes from dependence on God.

Matthew:

Matthew wanted to show that Jesus was the new Moses, the lawgiver of the New Covenant. He constructs his Gospel with five major sermons uttered by Jesus. That is, he collects all the sayings and utterances of Jesus he wanted to present and arranges them into five sermons, in imitation of the Five Books of Moses in the Jewish Scriptures (1- Sermon on the Mount: Mt. 4:23- 7:29; 2- Mission Discourse: Mt. 10:1-42; 3- Parables of the Kingdom: Mt. 13: 1-52; 4- Community Discourse: Mt. 18:1-35; 5- Woes and Coming of the Kingdom Discourse: Mt. 23: 1- 25:46).

Moreover, Matthew has Jesus go up on a mountain to utter this sermon, just as Moses gave the Law of God from the experience of Mount Sinai. Mountaintops were places where people encountered God in ancient times, both in the Jewish experience and in pagan religions. This is the lead sermon, the most important utterance, the sermon that gives the theme to all of Jesus's ministry. The Church needs to hear this sermon addressed to itself in every age and in every circumstance. No culture is exempt from the provisions of this discourse. Our age listens to the Sermon on the Mount with a new kind of attention, since we are in an age of 'new founding,' an age of the renewal of the Church after Vatican II. The provisions of this sermon must not be neglected as we seek the renewal of the Christian community.

The Law of Moses proposed as blessed those who received earthly fulfillment: prosperity, offspring, and a long life. In later Judaism, blessings are promised to those who will be faithful as salvation approaches. Happiness consists in the realization of having served God faithfully in this life for the sake of salvation.

Christianity proposes a new spirituality that precedes all religious activity. Worship and service are religious actions. Spirituality refers to attitudes and values that are derived from the core principles of a religious tradition.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus articulates and promulgates a set of spiritual values that must underlie all Christian religious actions. Christian worship and Christian service are based on the spiritual principles of the Beatitudes. This is not a new law, in the sense of legislative enactment. It consists of new attitudes and new values that motivate and energize our moral behaviors. *God blesses those who depend only on him (the poor in spirit). God blesses those who.... Happy are those who....* The world may consider you miserable, but Jesus says that you will be happy! Jesus will reverse the values and the consequences of the human situation. What society considers to be a threat, Jesus will convert into a blessing.

That which seems to oppress the masses will become a blessing in the transforming power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. New life will come from what appears to be death. Some are counted as dead among us; Jesus says that they are truly alive.

Those who are struggling for authenticity and honesty among us are those who are truly holy. Matthew adds a “you” beatitude for a persecuted Church!

Zephaniah:

This prophet (640-609 BCE) exercised his ministry in the Kingdom of Judah prior to the destruction of that kingdom by the forces of Babylon when the whole nation would be laid waste with all its institutions and visible signs of God’s favor utterly devastated. He addressed especially the religious leaders of the times. Their corruption and abuse of authority will find correction in God’s mighty punishment. Only the humble and the lowly will be spared. A *remnant* of the people still carry the torch of truth and justice in their humble dependence on God for all things. Their security rests in God alone, not in their own power or in the alliances of the mighty. God will protect them from ultimate harm.

1 Corinthians:

Paul reminds the Church at Corinth that their glory comes from God alone. They know full well what they were in the eyes of the world. They are not among the rich and powerful of the city; they cannot take pride in their advanced degrees and titles of honor. They are just a humble people chosen by God to show what can be done when God gives the gifts. All of their value comes from God’s gifts; their only power is God’s power. While their mission may be the most sublime, they cannot take pride in having furnished the attributes that will lead to success. God gives everything they will need.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you describe the difference between *religion* and *spirituality*? In what sense is *spirituality* an attitude toward life, a way of approaching reality, a system of meaning and value, a set of purposes and goals? Do you see that *religion* is a collection of behaviors, acts of worship, deeds of service based on the spiritual principles underneath the particular religion? What are some of the elements of your *spirituality*? What impact does your *spirituality* have on your *religious practice*?

2. Have you been able to grasp the difference between the spirituality of the Beatitudes and the spirit of laws and obligations in religions? Can you apply the spirituality of the Beatitudes to the observance of the Holy Days of Obligation in the Catholic Church? In what sense are we *obligated* to celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays and Holy Days? What do you make of “Holy Days *without Obligation*, such as the Solemnity of the Mother of God when it occurs on a Monday or a Saturday?” (Please don’t mind me! I am just being cynical about the whole business of Holy Days *with or without obligation*!)

3. Suppose you had just signed up to be a Christian. The first lesson is the Sermon on the Mount. How do you feel challenged in your values by this discourse? Do you find “good news” in this message? What changes are you going to have to make in your heart after hearing this teaching? How can Christians take this message more seriously?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Begin the practice of an examination of conscience every night based on the Beatitudes. Ask yourself whether you have placed all your trust in God that day. Ask yourself whether you have been a peacemaker. Ask yourself whether you have desired justice more than food and drink that day.

PRAYER

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love....

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Christians define happiness differently from other people. Disciples of Jesus have assumed the value system preached and practiced by their master. They look at reality with different eyes; they have adopted an alternative vision of happiness.

The beginning of the great Sermon on the Mount sets the standards for the New Law. Jesus as the new Moses gives a new set of “laws” for the guidance of his disciples. The Beatitudes mark a shift of paradigm, a new view of our relationship with God and with one another. The Paschal Mystery, the dying and rising of Jesus Christ applied to our lives in faith, is anticipated in this foundational teaching of Jesus. A reversal of values becomes possible when God is the author and the goal of all human striving. Who would have believed that death leads to new life? That laying down one’s life will bring life everlasting? That those who show mercy will be shown mercy? That the poor are those who will rejoice more than others?

Have you heard the testimony of missionaries to Africa or to Latin America, where the poor are the ones who share everything they have with you when you visit them? How different that is from the middle class ways of striving and of competing which we are all familiar with. St. Teresa of Calcutta shared how much she received from those who have nothing to give!

God’s people were promised a land of their own under Abraham. Jesus promises to give the kingdom of heaven to those who belong to him. There is a moral component to the Beatitudes. Whereas the world worships wealth and earthly power, the disciples of Jesus are invited to seek to do works of love and forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. We do not strive for earthly possessions but for the love of God that will transform our lives and make us holy. We want only to love and to be loved. We challenge the values of possessing and of owning, seeking rather to give and to be received.

Beatitudes are “God’s attitudes.” The more we adopt God’s attitudes, the more we belong to God.

(See: The Catechism: # 1716-28)

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