

January 29, 2023
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13
Psalm 146:6-7, 8-10
1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Matthew 5:1-12
Scriptures taken from NAB

“Save us, O Lord our God. And gather us from the nations, to give thanks to your holy name, and make it our glory to praise you.”

The Entrance Antiphon sets the stage for today’s homily in that you and I really do need the Lord’s help in making it a priority to offer Him a humble and contrite heart.

The bottom line is, we live in the midst of a very troubled world, a reality we must not deny or sugar coat; yet should it surprise us? Jesus said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Needless to say, we are in this world, but we do not have to be entangled with this world. Jesus has given us specific instructions to guide us to freedom.

We shared in last week’s homily that Jesus started his earthly ministry with a few basic instructions; mainly repent and follow me, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Subsequently, we also learned that if we want to be counted in the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus said that repentance is a required first step, followed by the second step – follow or come after me.

So far so good, but as you already know - easier said than done, yet that's just the way it is most of the time. Good things take time and energy. If you want a stellar vegetable garden with loads of healthy vegetables it will take a lot of hard work, whereas weeds – well they grow naturally all by themselves.

The other day I was listening to a message given last Sunday to encourage proclaiming the gospel to those whom we might meet. But then the speaker described their concept of proclaiming the gospel in a nutshell - as witnessing, and then sharing God's supernatural power at work in the natural world.

I won't go into particulars of the message, but it left me thinking, what does it mean for you and me to share or "proclaim the gospel?" What is the gospel? We have read the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We talk about the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom of God. So how are we to understand exactly what is the gospel we are to proclaim?

Thus, these questions serve as a segue to the heart of today's homily concerning the *Sermon On the Mount*. But first let's address an ancient definition for proclaiming the gospel. In the early Greek language, the word for gospel, *evangelion* means "good news." The "good news." Well, you might say, if the stock market goes up that's good news too, isn't it? Okay, so we will have to go a little deeper and place the proclaiming of the gospel in its original context.

In the ancient world the word *evangelion* actually pertained to the announcement or message heralded by the king's messenger to a city or a people group. For example, when a messenger came back

to the city to report on how the king's battle was going against the people's enemy the *evangelion* or good news would contain three parts, 1) who his lord and master is, 2) what he has accomplished (hopefully his victory over the enemy, and 3) what that lord expects from the person, city, or people when he arrives home from the battle.

However, sometimes the king would not return from the battle. What if he was killed? Another person might take his place with different expectations. Unfortunately, on the other hand, it could even be the enemy king sending a message of the new conditions, especially if he won the battle.

With that contextual information, today the word gospel ought to be used by Christians to refer to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the *Christus Victor* or victorious Christ ever conquering over the powers of evil. Jesus is not just our best buddy who brings us happy thoughts and good gifts.

Using classical and historical definitions and terms, the gospel we are to proclaim is the Good News of our Lord and King Jesus Christ and the reign of the Kingdom of God. Thus, our testimony or our witness is a whole lot more than God is good and He is good all the time. Our covenant duty is to proclaim, 1) who are Lord and Master is, 2) what He has accomplished in and by His victory, and finally, 3) to teach what He expects of His disciples and followers.

Which brings us to today's reading from the *Sermon on the Mount* found in the 5th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. Here the goal of today's homily is not to offer a comprehensive study or even a detailed overview of probably one of the most famous passages

found in the New Testament. The fact is there are so many good commentaries on this monumental sermon that the best I could do in the short amount of time we have would pale in comparison to what is readily available.

Subsequently an exegetical study of the *Sermon on the Mount* is not on our agenda as much as it is to bring an awareness that in the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus offers you and me a rich and masterfully crafted summation of what is required to live as a born again, blood washed, and spirit-filled disciple of the Son of God.

Hence the Psalmist suggests a daring proposition, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man [or woman] that [trusts] in him” (Psalm 34:8 KJV). Subsequently the Lord God provided a way for us to eat our fill of both the spoken Word of God recorded in the Sacred Scripture, and the visible Word of God in the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Humbly consuming both on a regular basis provides all that we need to sustain a hungry soul in the kingdom of heaven.

In like manner the *Sermon on the Mount* is a rich feast of life-giving principles that when incorporated into the lifeline or bloodstream of the collective Body of Christ it brings health and wholeness to all concerned. Only when actively pursued will the benefits of the Sermon make sense in that the list of blessed or happy causes and effects are more than just a list of noble assertions resulting in a system of beliefs; - they are instead a way of life - the very means by which we are able to maintain the good works of repentance indicative of those who follow hard after the Lord and His Kingdom

In essence the *Sermon on the Mount* personifies the very heart and practice of Jesus illuminating both the spiritual and the practical mechanics of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The truth being, if we truly want to enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven, and here I presume that we all do, then it would be prudent to consider how St Paul warned the churches in Rome that the Kingdom of Heaven is more than just enjoying the prosperity of the secular world. Those blessings or curses (it all depends) can vanish overnight.

Romans 14:17 states that the true Kingdom of Heaven consists of a way of life that demonstrates, “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Furthermore verse 18 goes on to say, “For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.”

In the second reading today, we noted that St Paul when writing his first letter to the Corinthian churches had already come to terms with the *Sermon on the Mount* and thus, he was able to honestly say,

When I came to you brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words or wisdom, but with a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that your

faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Indeed, the blessed apostle's understanding of the *Sermon on the Mount* demonstrates a comprehensive applied theology concerning spiritual formation and following the risen Christ. Thus, St. Augustine wrote,

If anyone were to ponder with piety and seriousness the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ gave on the mount, I believe that he would discover there, as far as norms for high moral living are concerned, the perfect way to lead the Christian life.

Returning for a moment to the blessed *Sermon* we realize just how important the *Sermon on the Mount* is to the historical Church because the lectionary actually dedicates six Gospel readings on six different Sundays to the Lord's famous discourse.

Subsequently, few would argue the historical significance the Sermon on the Mount would have in framing the basic piety of both Eastern and Western Christianity. Nevertheless there have been some who have attempted to discredit the *Sermon* by likening it to the Law as totally impossible to keep as a manner of life. Those who take this position tend to miss the greater purposes our Lord had in giving us practical guidelines for following after Him.

Here then is a practical theological question. By what standard(s) are we to judge the validity of our actions? Can we trust our conscience, society, or do we need to refer back to the Law of

Moses? The failure of the first two is obvious; however, in contrast to Moses who brought the Law down from the Mount to the people, Jesus brought the people up to the top of the mount where He gave them what we might describe as a NT Law in *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Here this new Law is to be ratified with faith and action. Jesus said repent, and follow after me. In other words, repent - change your thinking, change your direction, and come after me or as we learned last week “become like me.” Hence to become like Him, to talk like Him, to act like Him, and to live like Him encapsulates the whole premise of “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Jesus gave us clear guidelines to follow when He said I am poor in spirit. I am mournful and acquainted with the sorrow of others. I am meek. I hunger and I thirst for righteousness. I am merciful. I am clean of heart. I am a peacemaker. I am persecuted for righteousness. If you come after me you too will face opposition, some even horrific opposition because of me, but rejoice, and be happy in your sufferings because your reward will be great in heaven.

So, in closing we see that the sacred tenents found in the *Sermon on the Mount* could be likened to seeds, maybe like mustard seeds that when coupled with faith and watered by the Word and the Sacraments they grow into wonderful wedding gifts to be presented in the future to the King of kings.

In the same manner that good seed planted in a garden takes time and hard work to come to maturity, so our works of righteousness

described in the Sermon will also take a lifetime to come to fruition.

Thankfully we have each other to offer encouragement along the way. In the meantime - our job will be to show up everyday, do our due diligence concerning study, prayer, meditation, and sacramental worship, pick up our crosses, set our hands to the plow, and then not look back as we follow hard after Him.

So then, - we have our marching orders, all we need do is take the first step, and when we trip or stumble, because we will, simply pray Psalm 69:2, "O God come to my assistance, O Lord make haste to help me," and the Promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit will surely come to render us aid. Good News indeed.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen