

LESSON 12

THE FIFTH THROUGH THE EIGHTH BEATITUDES

BACKGROUND READING



Jesus came to earth to fulfill the Old Law and the prophets, which promised a Messiah that would save us from sin and death and bring us to new life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that “The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching” (CCC 1716); therefore, through the Beatitudes we see the perfection and fulfillment of the Old Law in the New. The Ten Commandments can be viewed in large as a law of restriction whose fulfillment is found in the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Ten Commandments declare mainly what we should not do, while the Beatitudes declare those blessed who do and are. This shift from restriction to positive action illustrates the Old Law being brought to life by the New Law of the Gospel. When Jesus said the we must be perfect as His heavenly Father is perfect (cf. Matthew 5:48), He knew that we could not achieve this perfection on our own. Rather, His grace transforms us through the power of His Holy Spirit so that we can walk in His footsteps, on the path that He has already shown us – The path of the Beatitudes. Let us therefore explore the final four Beatitudes and observe how Christ served as a model for us to live them out.

The Fifth through the Eighth Beatitudes

The fifth beatitude states: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). The merciful give what they have themselves received, mercy. The merciful forgive as the Father Himself forgives, and it is in this forgiveness that the merciful find their joy. Jesus Himself forgave the sins of many and did so without condemnation and as often as necessary, but always called the sinner to sin no more. Christ’s Death on the Cross brought forgiveness for our sinfulness and removed our deserved punishment. We are called to forgive as Christ forgave, to give the forgiveness that we ourselves have received so that we might be kind and compassionate toward one another.

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8) is the sixth beatitude. The clean or pure-hearted are those without selfish motives, and who have integrity. Jesus contrasted the clean of heart with the hypocritical Pharisees who went through the motions of keeping the Law, but were empty in their hearts. Jesus was clean of heart because He was free of sin and resisted

all human temptation for worldly desire and power. He who was innocent of sin took on our sins so that we could be purified. We are called to repent of our sins and believe in the Good News. We must strive to make sure that our actions and piety truly come from the heart. And we must avoid the temptations and sin that defile us and make us unclean, without judging the hearts of our neighbors.

In the seventh beatitude, Jesus teaches us: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Jesus lives out this beatitude in His Incarnation: He assumed a human nature to reconcile us to the Father so that we can be the sons and daughters of God. The peacemaker is one who treats others the way he or she would want to be treated, that is, with humility, gentleness, patience, and common support through love, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Those who make peace are righteous in God’s eyes. Jesus is our peace and He gives us His peace, through the Holy Spirit, by which we are sent to proclaim His peace to the world. We are called to live in peace with everyone, through prayer and thanksgiving, and above all, by placing our trust in Jesus, the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

The final beatitude states: “Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of

righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). Jesus endured insults, false accusations, persecution, insistent questioning, plots of entrapment, and death, all so that we might join Him in Heaven. When we suffer, especially for Jesus, we can grow strong in love for Him to be with Him for eternity. All those who follow in Christ’s footsteps will be persecuted, because of the contrary message of the Gospel to society, who first persecuted Christ Himself. The persecuted, however, respond with blessings, gentleness and endurance. In Christ’s suffering, Passion, and Death, He endured the greatest of persecution for our sake. As witnesses of Christ, we are called to be like Christ, even unto death, and to endure our own crosses for His sake. In our weaknesses, we must rely on the strength of Christ.

When we suffer, especially for Jesus, we can grow strong in love for Him to be with Him for eternity. In Jesus’ life we see the Beatitudes lived out in reality. We can also live according to the Beatitudes by following Christ. As Jesus taught the ancient Jews that the Beatitudes fulfilled the Old Testament promises, Jesus teaches that the Beatitudes will enable us to live the life of Christ.

LESSON 13

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE MISSION OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

BACKGROUND READING



When God revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave us the law, or rules for the moral life. Jesus fulfilled the law and gave it even greater meaning in the Beatitudes, and in His Great Commandments to love God above all, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In addition to teaching us about how to live a moral life, all of Scripture shows us that the need for law, society, and government is written into human nature. Human beings were created for communion with God, as well as with each other. The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes tell us about how individual persons should treat each other, and they also tell us much about how a just society should be ordered. Societies, after all, are made up of individual human beings. In all the societies we live in, we are called to build the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Community and citizenship

The first society we become a part of is the family. The Lord elevated the dignity of marriage to a Sacrament. Helped by God's

grace, the love of a husband and wife becomes an image of the life-giving love of the Trinity. In the normal course of things, their love creates life. Whether our families live together or not, every person on this planet was born to a mother and a father. The family is the most basic unit of society. Like any society, it has rules: the Fourth Commandment requires children to honor their parents. What is more, parents have the first and most important responsibility of teaching their children our Faith, educating them, and respecting and encouraging their vocations. Parents should respect and encourage the vocations of their children. Parents should teach their children that the first calling of every Christian is to follow Christ. In these ways, parents cooperate with God not only in bringing forth life, but also in nurturing creation.

The family is also the first place where young people learn what it means to be a citizen of the society they live in. What citizenship means will vary based on the form of government in a society. Different forms of government have existed throughout history,

as human beings have struggled with finding and maintaining the best way of life. Some of these governments have been good, while others have been tyrannical and oppressive.

The most important quality of what makes any society or government good is its treatment of the human person. If respect for the dignity of the human person is not at the center of a society, that society will soon turn into tyranny. For a society to be just, governments and all individuals living in it must put the human person at the center: they must work for the common good, behave in moral ways, and respect the natural rights of all human beings.

Our natural rights flow from our human dignity and are a gift from God; they are not given to us by the government. If rights were “given to us” by the government, then some people could have more rights than others, and no one could say there was anything wrong with that. Pope Benedict XIV wrote in *Caritas in Veritate*: “If the only basis of human rights is to be found in the deliberations of an assembly of citizens, those rights can be changed at any time.” This is one reason why the common good of the whole human family calls for countries to cooperate with each other and with international organizations. Doing so reminds all nations that our human dignity comes from being made in the image of and likeness of God, and our rights flow from our human dignity.

The equal dignity of all human beings does not mean we are all the same. Everyone is born with different gifts and talents, whether those are for academics, sports, art, music, design, and so forth. Wealth is not evenly distributed either. Differences in talents, resources, and other things mean those who

have more must practice charity and help the needy. Giving to the poor is an action that shows the world what it means to love your neighbor. It is a work of social justice that is especially pleasing to God. These differences also mean that governments and citizens have a very serious responsibility to work to reduce social and economic inequalities, and end sinful inequalities. Inequalities are sinful when some people are unfairly prevented from reaching their potential. All human beings have a right to truly develop themselves. This development involves our entire being, and is ultimately about whether each member of our human family can answer God’s call to be who He is calling us to be.

Human Solidarity

All who follow Jesus are unified in a society of friendship in Christ. This principle is called solidarity and is a demand of human and Christian brotherhood. We are all members of Christ’s Body, the Church. Like all the parts of a body are connected, so too are all the members of Christ’s body connected. We practice solidarity when we bear each other’s sufferings, and when we make sure that material things, like food, clothing, and other resources are distributed justly. Workers practice solidarity by doing an honest day’s work. Employers practice solidarity by paying a just wage. Peace in the world depends on us all being in solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters in other countries. Even more importantly, we all practice solidarity when we share spiritual goods, like prayers and penance. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for all of our sins. We can make sacrifices and offer prayers to help our fellow Christians. When we live in Christian

solidarity, then we are a light to the nations as a model of justice and peace, and living out the values of the Kingdom of God. While the Kingdom of God will not be fully realized until the end of time, and therefore we cannot expect a perfect human society, we can show others that social goods result from walking the path of Life in Christ.

We have now spent the year studying how to walk in the Life of Christ. Our loving Father wants nothing more than for us to find the fulfillment of all our joy in eternity with Him in Heaven. We can trust in His mercy and love that if we follow the signposts He left for us, that we will find our way to Him.