

4th Sunday of the Year [A] 2026 (St. Joe, St. Charles H)

This gospel passage contains probably the most famous words, which Jesus ever spoke. We call it the Sermon on the Mount, and this part contains the Beatitudes. It has been read and prayed over thousands of times. Probably as many thousands of times have preachers given sermons about these words. I often have wondered: If this was *Jesus*’ sermon, then what am I going to say that can add anything to it? And now you are wondering: Well, why doesn’t he just sit down and shut up? Indulge me! I promise to be brief!

And speaking of brief, Pope Francis in address to diocesan liturgical directors three years ago, made the statement that “lengthy, abstract homilies are a disaster,” and that “homilies should be no more than 8-10 minutes, and always include a thought, a feeling, an image, that people may bring something home with them.” I think the Holy Father’s advice was excellent. Pope Leo seems to follow it and so shall I.

The Sermon on the Mount is three chapters long in Matthew’s Gospel, and this passage of the Beatitudes forms the introduction. We will hear succeeding parts of his sermon for the next two Sundays until Lent begins. But this is without a doubt the most well-known section.

Jesus is talking to the common people of his day, people who were living close to the edge, people under the rule of Rome, people struggling to survive from day to day. He is letting them know that life’s troubles and difficulties will some day be reversed for those who open their hearts to the Kingdom he came to bring.

The Greek word (and that is the language in which we find the original form of all four of the gospels), the Greek word that begins each beatitude is *makarios*. The word means “happy” in an

ordinary sense, but it also means one who is *especially* happy or favored or fortunate. That is why it is usually translated “blessed.”

I wonder if Jesus were giving this sermon today, how would he shape it? What words would he speak to us, 2000 years later, to get across the same message? Perhaps he would pull up a folding chair in the midst of a bible study group, or sit on the couch in your family room with a few neighbors gathered, and say something like this:

“If you are struggling to pay bills, but insist on making time to be with your children whenever they need you, blessed are you—you may never have a big vacation home and drive a luxury SUV, but heaven will be yours.

“If you are overwhelmed by the care of a dying spouse, a sick child or an elderly parent with Alzheimer’s, but you are determined to make a loving home for them, blessed are you—one day your sorrow will be turned into joy.

“If you willingly give your time to cook at a soup kitchen, shovel the neighbor’s driveway, help in a classroom; if you befriend the uncool, the unpopular, the perpetually lost, blessed are you—count God among your friends and biggest boosters.

“If you refuse to take shortcuts when it comes to doing what is right, if you refuse to compromise your integrity and ethics, if you refuse to take refuge in the rationalization that ‘everybody does it,’ blessed are you—you will triumph.

“If you try to understand things from the perspective of the other person and always manage to make things work for the good; if you are feeling discouraged and frustrated because you are always waiting, always bending over backwards, always paying

the price for loving the unlovable and forgiving the undeserving, blessed are you—God will welcome, forgive and love **you**.

“If you struggle to discover what God is asking of you in all things; if you seek God’s presence in every aspect of your life and every decision you make; if your daily prayer is not ‘give me,’ but ‘help me,’ blessed are you—God will always be there for you.

“If you readily spend time listening and consoling anyone who looks to you for support, for guidance, for compassion; if you manage to heal wounds and build bridges; if others see in you graciousness, joy and serenity; if you see the good in everyone and *seek* the good for everyone, blessed are you—you are nothing less than God’s own.

“If you are rejected or demeaned because of the color of your skin or the sound of your name; if your faith automatically puts you at odds with some people; if you refuse to compromise to ‘get along’ or not ‘make waves,’ blessed are you—one day you will live with God. Rejoice and be glad,” Jesus tells those who are gathered, “You are the blessed of God. In the end, heaven will be yours.”

I think that Jesus would also tell us that many of the “blessed ones” are right here among us. The “blessed” of God, despite the struggles and discouragements of life are always ready and able to embrace the spirit of humility that begins with valuing life as a gift from God, a gift we received only through God’s profound and limitless love—nothing we have done or earned, but *only pure gift*.

May our great and glorious God give each one of us the vision, the courage, and the grace to embrace the “blessedness” of the Beatitudes—to live lives in loving gratitude to God, who invites us to ”rejoice and be glad... the kingdom of heaven is ours.”