

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 4th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A1

How many times have you been asked or asked yourself, “What is heaven like?” What is it going to be like? I believe we all try to draw pictures of it in our minds. Listening to the Beatitudes today, I like how the first one and the last one (the ‘poor in spirit’ and the ‘persecuted’ condition) have a promise attached to them, that they’ll be given the ‘kingdom of heaven’ (the exact phrase used-‘theirs is the kingdom of heaven’). With bookends (first & last) like that, I sense Jesus is saying that the Kingdom /Heaven is visibly manifest in the intervening qualities (the other six rewards- comforted, satisfied, land inheriting, to ‘see God’ *(where but in heaven)* and to be called ‘children of God’ *(where are children but with their parent-God the Father’s House)*). So, I find that what Jesus is revealing in this ‘Beatitudes talk’ is the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ itself. If we are looking! *(I recall that the catechism refers to heaven as the ‘Beatific Vision’-Catechism #1028-kind of a lofty description- but there it is!)*

SO, Jesus is pulling back the curtain to heaven to show us a glimpse of it. But, before we get discouraged, because we might feel like, we just don’t see it, that’s okay. It is expected that when we first hear the beatitudes, we’ll ask, “What, again?” Blessed? Blessed are the ‘poor, persecuted, hungry & thirsty, mourning’? How are they blessed? In what world? What sense can we make of these ‘blessings’ of Jesus? I suggest we step back a minute and read again a couple of phrases in the first line of today’s reading. 1) ‘Jesus went up mount’, and the ‘Apostles came to Him’. First, up the mount. This takes going up. We have to put in effort, climb, strive, work at pushing upward. And then the ‘come to Jesus’ part, which means we must be willing to set aside what we ‘think’, our ‘way’, our comfortable world routine, and go to Him, accepting His position (on the mount) and look at it all through His eyes-from His view by sticking close to Him. I don’t want to jump to the end too quickly, but that is what brings out the blessing in anything: Jesus Himself. He makes it, all, a blessing. The secret of the Beatitudes is that in the presence of a special someone, everything can be okay. Just being with them, even in the worst of conditions, light can still shine and joy can still be had and all can be endured, simply because of that person with you. Here, it’s Jesus Himself. So if we climb, put in the effort, and ‘come to Him’, then Yes, Beatitude, Blessings-Heavenly Happiness will be ours.

I grant full well though, that from a distance (away from Jesus), these descriptions/qualities that He mentions don’t sound anything like a blessing- poverty, sadness, persecution, hunger, thirst, & peacemaking *(peacemaking means*

that you stand between two fighters so that you get beat up in the middle-get it from both sides). They don't sound like good things-blessings, from the world's perspective and how it looks at things. But Jesus brings the blessing to it. He brings the reversal-the upending-the flipping of the world's values. What I'm saying, is that with Jesus, He can transform poverty to wealth, sadness to joy, & persecution to peace. Because of simply being with him, He makes all difference converting a curse into a blessing. That is heaven. It is who we are with and how we look at it. That is heaven

Another way to think of the Beatitudes comes from an old story I love. It is told about a family that lived in the country on a modest little farm – a little one, but they got by. One day, the father asked his son if he wanted to come with him to visit his uncle and cousin, in the big city, while he took care of some business. The boy said 'Sure'. So, the father dropped him off with his brother in the city (& boy's cousin) to spend the day playing, doing kid things. Late that night, after the man completed his business, he picked up his son and begin the drive back to the country, after the kid's day of city comforts and amusements. The boy was extraordinarily quiet and the father started to get concerned. "Oh no" he thought, "he's got the city bug – after seeing all the glitz and entertainment of city life, he may never be content again on their humble little farm". He asked him, "Son, is everything okay?" The boy replied, "No, Dad, I feel sorry for cousin Scott - I didn't know how rich we were". Puzzled, his dad asked, "What?" And the boy said, *"Well, we have got so much, Dad, I was embarrassed to say anything to Scott. For example, we have the whole sky full of stars to see at night, and they only have those streetlamps. We have all the deer, raccoons and rabbits of the woods, to watch run and play, and they only have a dog to take out to the sidewalk. We have the beautiful rushing stream creek that runs right by our house, and they only have the pool off their porch. We have all the fields and hills to walk and hike over, and they only have a caged-in square behind their home. I never knew we were so rich until we visited them"*. Isn't that a flip of our expectations? Probably if asked, who was wealthier, our bias would have been to say how advanced and elite the city life was, until this child discovered for us what was most important about living close to the earth with others. This type of insight is what is behind understanding the beatitudes as the blessing they truly are.

It is who we are with – Jesus – that brings the blessing to anything-everything (and consequently how we view all what is around us). The boy in that story reminds me of how many times, I have heard our seniors, our elders, people

say after they reflect upon their life growing up, they say, 'Back then, nobody knew they were poor, we were all in the same boat in the county, we had big family and each other – nothing else seemed to matter *(Some might add 'We didn't know better' but I would say, 'No, you did know better-the best, you lived it with each other!')* So, in the Beatitudes, Jesus teaches us that He brings blessing to all conditions. Anything can bless us, even deprivation, if we have Him and others to share in it with us!

Similar Beatitude Story

When a man asked God in prayer, what the difference between heaven and hell was, God showed a man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of vegetable stew. It smelled delicious and made the man's mouth water, but the people were all sitting around the table were thin, sickly and appearing famished. They held long handled spoons and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. So they were in miserable suffering. God said, "That's Hell." And then, behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. Same type, large round table with the large pot of wonderful vegetable stew that still made the man's mouth water. People had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking. God said, 'This is heaven". What's the difference? Well, in the first one, no one fed anyone else – they only tried to use their long spoons to feed themselves, yet in the second, heaven, each person fed another, reaching across the table to give food to the other. And all were fed full! Loving, giving to others like Jesus makes the difference. Blessing comes with Jesus, yet we have to climb and come to Him. Be with Him, and See like Him!