

[Readings: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13; Psalm 146; 1 Cor 1:26-31; Matt 5:1-12a]

We Christians often count our many blessings in these categories: family, a nice home, friendships that enable us to flourish, a good job, financial security. But it is the strange Christian who says, I count as blessings poverty of spirit, mourning the condition of our world, and the existence of persecution. Yet, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus reveals to us the strangeness of blessings in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 5 begins by locating Jesus' preaching geographically: "He went up a mountain" (Mt 5:1). For us modern readers, this may seem like an unimportant detail. But in the history of Israel, God reveals things on mountains. In the Book of Exodus, Moses receives the Law on the mountaintop.

Jesus speaks this Law in a different way. For Him, the Law was never merely a series of commands that led Israel to fear God's punishment. Instead, the Law is that which sets Israel apart as the chosen people who walk in the way of the Lord. Thus, what now we refer to as the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew serve as the foundation of this remnant identity as citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven. Which Beatitude speaks most powerfully to you today?

These Beatitudes are not simply a matter of behavior modification. For Jesus alone is the One who can live these Beatitudes perfectly as the Word made Flesh. Jesus reveals in the Sermon on the Mount what we must become to belong to the Church. We must become like Jesus, our very Lord. It is much easier to WORSHIP Jesus Christ than to BECOME like Jesus Christ!

Let the Holy Spirit make the connection and the transition between both worshipping Jesus and becoming more like Jesus!

Simply pray this: "Please, Lord, help me to spread your word." At the time, we didn't know what the prayer may have fully meant, or where it would lead us. That will be revealed in time. And that is the beauty of Jesus' call. Rather than assign specific jobs to each of us, Jesus accompanies us on our journey and shows us how our desired vocation can serve God's reign.

Open to the Holy Spirit, we discover where Jesus wants us to be and what Jesus wants us to do. And whom does He call? St. Paul tells us in today's Second Reading: God calls not the powerful and those of noble birth. God calls the foolish, the weak, the lowly and despised to give God's wisdom in order to do the work of the Kingdom. How many of us fit that bill? Are YOU foolish, weak, lowly and despised by a few others? I know that I am one of them!

As one biblical commentator put it: "Jesus invites carpenters to build His temple, physicians to heal immortal souls, merchants to invest in pearls of great price," and fishers to become fishers of souls in service to God.

As we grow in faith, our daily work doesn't necessarily change, but our intention and purpose do. Like the spirit-filled first disciples, we strive to spread God's word in whatever we do.

This is my vision, my dream, my hope for each one of you. It is ambitious. To re-discover and to deepen our beautiful Catholic faith, to celebrate what we have, and then to share what we have with others. In other words, the words of our parish mission: To strive, to celebrate and to serve. Are you with me???

I close with a prayer composed by St. Thomas Aquinas, whose feast day is this weekend:

"Grant me, O Lord my God,
a mind to know you,
a heart to seek you,
Wisdom to find you,
conduct pleasing to you,
faithful perseverance in waiting for you,
and a hope of finally embracing you."

AMEN!