

God's Rules for Happiness

Date: Jan. 25, 2016

Place: Our Lady's Christian School

Occasion: Christian Unity Week Gospel Lesson: Matthew 5:1-16

Theme: God's rules, happiness

I just want to thank Father John for inviting me to share with you this afternoon. It is an honor, and I rejoice that we are able to share our faith in Jesus Christ together.

Everyone wants to be happy, don't they? But many people, maybe even most people, are not happy. I wonder why. We live in a free country where we are free to do the things we want. We live in a country where, for most of us, all of our basic needs are met.

Why is it, then, that so many people are unhappy? They're in charge of their life, doing the things they want to do, having almost everything they want, and yet they're still unhappy. The answer is very simple.

They have not let God be the center and focus of their life. The Gospel lesson today comes from the Gospel of Matthew, in a section of the Bible we refer to as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says Blessed are the people who.... And then he gives some guidelines.

Bible translators sometimes translate the word "blessed" as happy. So, in other words, Jesus says, "Happy are the people who live like this." He tells us these people will be blessed, they will be happy. Let's look at each of those beatitudes, or blessings.

Happy are they who know they are spiritually poor. Why are *they* blessed, why will they be happy? Because they have learned they need God; they know they can't depend on themselves alone.

The spiritually poor recognize they need God, and when they seek Him, they will find him. And they will be happy.

Happy are those who mourn. These are the people who recognize their sin and it makes them sad. They repent and turn to Jesus. They will be comforted, knowing their sin is forgiven.

Happy are the meek, or the humble. Humility is not putting yourself down. Christian humility is the belief that *all* people are loved by God, not just some of the people. The humble person respects other people, believing that all people are children of God.

Happy are the spiritually hungry. Let me say it this way. Happy are the people who want to do God's will above everything else. That's called commitment. Is it *your* primary goal in life to discover and to do what God wants? Happiness will be ours when we put God first in our lives.

Happy are the merciful. The discipline of Christian forgiveness, or mercy, is an effort to restore broken relationships to their right place. Forgiveness shows our willingness to give up all thoughts of punishing or getting even with the other person. Mercy is not weakness. It takes a great deal of strength to make a wrong relationship right again.

Happy are the pure in heart. Purity of heart is to desire only one thing. The pure seek God and only God. That person is the same in private and in public. There is no hypocrisy or double standard. The pure in heart mean what they say, and do what they promise.

Happy are they who work for peace. People who work for peace are reconcilers. Their goal is to resolve differences between

people and bring people together. Then, our enemies become our brothers and our sisters.

Finally, **happy are the ones who are insulted and persecuted for following Jesus.** To be a Christian requires courage. It is not always easy. People may ridicule us or make fun of us. Jesus promises that we will be blessed for sticking to our convictions, even if people poke fun at our faith. It may be hard, but we will be rewarded for our faith.

If you want to be happy, Jesus must be the model for your life. The Beatitudes describe both Jesus and the life of a Christian, one who follows Jesus.

When Jesus finished with his blessings, he told his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” Do you know what that means?

It means that we will be different than people who don’t follow Jesus. We need to show them the way by living out our faith. Then we will make the world a better place, much like salt makes food taste better. Then we will show people the way, much like a light shines in the darkness.

All of us Christians, working together: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, United Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, we’re all trying to show the world what it looks like to follow Jesus. And along the way, by living the Beatitudes, we discover what real happiness is.

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