

## St Pius & St Anthony 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Homily 2026 Year A

What a name? Beatitudes means Blessings? Do they sound like blessings? Poverty, mourning, hungering, persecution? How is that blessed? Seems like anti-blessings to me – they are deprivations! Even the ones that sound good, like ‘meek’, ‘merciful’, ‘peacekeeping’, ‘pure in heart’ (*we might think “How wonderful. I want to be ‘meek’, ‘peacemaking’.....”*) Even those – if we look closely, they all have steep costs, too. For example, **meekness** means you are the last in all lines-the lowly and left behind (takes lots of patience), **peacemaking** sounds good until you try it – step between two hostile opponents and see who takes all the licks-you (*it didn’t happen just once, in my high school that I’d see two guys getting hauled to the principal’s office, while one of them was protesting, “but I was breaking up the fight - when you came in”*), or we might think being **Merciful** is rewarding, but to show mercy mean you give it yourself to make it right - pardoning somebody by paying their fine yourself (ransoming a slave by taking their place!), and does the **pure in heart**, *sound easy?*, except when you consider it means being completely selfless – no desires met, no pleasures enjoyed, & not even making any personal requests yourself. So, all eight beatitudes involve sacrifice & discipline – who would joyfully sign up for that?

But we know Jesus is serious when teaching them! ‘Blessed are the poor’, He says, and He is the ‘Way & Truth’ (Jn 14:6), so somehow, YES, to be poor and persecuted is ‘Blessed’. So, we have to struggle to understand, what Jesus means by saying they are actually blessings!

I like to point out that Matthew’s gospel gives us a hint about them, in his first line (Mt 5:1), he says, “Jesus **went up** the mountain...” So, they are an uphill climb, that will involve striving, going up, heavenward - Jesus is raising the bar on Christian living – He asks for more, not any status quo, this is next level.

And John 17:16 gives us a clue, in Jesus high priestly prayer at Last Supper, He says **of** His disciples, “They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.” (**Not Of This World** – NOTW). Okay, now I get it! This Beatitude talk is ‘**other-worldly**’, and should strike us as challenging – a glimpse of heaven on earth (in the Lord’s Prayer, don’t we pray God’s will ‘*on earth as it is in heaven*’!)

So, we have to work at this, understanding the Beatitudes and then actually living this difference that Jesus inaugurates for us, in this Sermon on the Mount.

How might we understand these conditions: poverty, persecution or mourning as, in fact, blessings! Well, they are! I can think of two approaches: Some people suggest that the Beatitudes are like Jesus saying, “This too will pass” That they are anticipatory: future realizations looked toward, as encouragement

now, to build more persistence (Psalm 30:6 “weeping comes at night, but rejoicing comes in the morning). This does tie in with the common theme of Jesus’ teaching about ‘reversals’ that His kingdom brings about (*paradoxes---the last-first, the least-greatest- the humble exalted & the proud made low*). But another approach revealing the Beatitudes’ more immediate realization (now) is when we imagine them to be fulfilled by Jesus’ own presence. Looking at Jesus’ life/ministry, I see Him embody everyone one of these ‘blessed’ conditions. The ‘persecuted’ one is easiest to see, just look at the cross! The ‘peacemaking’ one is also obvious as everything He taught was about ‘reconciliation & forgiveness’-‘love enemy’ (Mt 5:43-45). But also, the meek, the mourning and those hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is a picture of Jesus! The one ‘poor in spirit’, well, Jesus told everyone the ‘Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head’ (Mt 8:20) and when He sent out the apostles on mission, He sent them with ‘nothing’ (Mt 10:10). So can we approach these conditions as ‘blessings’ because they bring out Jesus! What I mean is that Jesus ‘delivers’ in just those qualities – Take the missions that he sent out the apostles on, they were provided for (Lk 22:35) and it was Jesus who ‘provided’ – He **brought the blessing** to them through those states of deprivation! If we want to find Jesus, enter into those conditions (Jesus came precisely for: the ‘lost’-Lk 19:10 & ‘sick’-Mt 9:12). Or consider His perfect ‘hide & seek’ reveal when He told the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt 25:40,45), He was exactly to be found in the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the ‘stranger’! That is where Jesus is! So, the Beatitude is fulfilled when we see & respond. Jesus brings about the blessing by His presence—that is where he shows, & where we must go!

But there may even be one more approach to seeing the Beatitudes truly as the blessings they are! Jesus is inviting us to glimpse the Kingdom of God even now. We do experience ‘other-worldly’ blessings here, now. Imagine how you have experienced before the beatitude, ‘Blessed are the poor’ – have you ever let go, gave away and tossed material things and then discovered ‘who knew I had this much time now’ -having surrendered the material item you then realized how much precious time that item had been stealing from you (those cases when we realize that we don’t own our stuff, IT **owns** us- we don’t control it, It **controls** us- its maintenance schedule **dictates** our schedule). Its loss is our gain! Or how about the beatitude, “Blessed are they who mourn...” Well, I can see that to mean how blessed I am, if I am sad, because it shows how good/loved the someone was that I miss! It was/is that good (better to love and lose, than never to have loved at all!) Or how about the beatitude, “Blessed are the meek, they inherit the earth”? I see that all the time. Who really runs this world and gets things done? The humble

meek just doing their job! The lowly, 'behind the scenes' workers (no attn) are the ones who keep the lights on and buses running. Ask that board room CEO for help changing a tire? Ask that professor to help fix a frozen water pipe? Ask the governor/president to garden and grow any food plant/crop? It's meek farmers who inherit the earth. Those humble workers who get things done, own the earth! So the key to the Blessing in Jesus' Beatitudes is seeing/finding Him in them!

Note:

Leo Tolstoy (War & Peace) wrote a great little parable story, title "How much land does a man need?" It tells drama of a man, obsessed with buying/trading land (always more), given a challenge on e day that as far as he could run over open land to mark four corners--- that will be his, if he can do it before sun sets... Of course, he takes off so energetically excited, and runs and runs, 'just a little bit more, that will be for cows pasture, that will be for son's home always little bot more, and when he realizes that the sun dropping in sky, he finally, turns back to get to start line again, and claim it all, but as sun gets close to setting, he has to push and push racing, until he finally does get back to line and collapses. While the crowd laughs, 'How much did he get, how much did he need?' They realize he is dead, and the chief says, 'Only those six feet', & they buried him.