

3

In the Light of the Master

THE BEATITUDES - A CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY CARD

In order to add flesh to the theories of what it means to be holy, Pope Francis places before us Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12). In these statements, we find what we must do, each in our own way, that leads to holiness. Not only do they tell us what Jesus taught, they actually show us a portrait of Jesus himself that we ourselves are called to reflect on in our daily lives. ***The Beatitudes are a Christian's identity card.***

Pope Francis challenges us to listen to these words in a way that unsettles us and allows us to be transformed by them:

"Let us listen once more to Jesus, with all the love and respect that the Master deserves. Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word" (GE,66).

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, as I read Jesus' words in sacred Scripture, give me an attentive heart to listen deeply to each word. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I will open myself as best I can to hear your word spoken to me this day. I will allow your word to unsettle me and to challenge me. I will be attentive to discerning your call for change in my life where it will bring me closer into relationship with you. Give me the courage to change where I need to so that your word can bear fruit in my life and not remain empty. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.



HOLINESS IS: BEING POOR OF HEART

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

What is it that gives us surety in our life, at the expense of the need for God? Wealth, for example, can allow us to be self-satisfied and leave no room for God or for others. Having a poor heart is similar to an attitude of "holy indifference" to all created things. This brings an interior freedom that allows the Lord's newness to enter.

Q. Would you say that you are 'poor in spirit', realising your need for God? Is there something that you cling to that gives you surety at the expense of allowing God to fill that space?

HOLINESS IS: REACTING WITH MEEKNESS AND HUMILITY

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"

In our path of holiness in which we seek to follow Jesus, he says to us: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). In a world of conflict, enmity, pride and vanity, Jesus proposes another way, that of gentleness and humility. Whilst some will see this attitude as weakness, it is in fact a gentle strength of those who can put their trust and hope in God alone. It is the attitude of gentleness and patience that we should bring when facing the limitations or faults of others, even our opponents.

Q. Do you find it easy or difficult to be gentle and humble? How might this be an attitude of strength, rather than weakness?



HOLINESS IS: KNOWING HOW TO MOURN WITH OTHERS

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

Mourning and painful situations are at odds with the entertainment and pleasure that the world holds up to us as to what makes for a good life. The world would rather try to cover up and hide pain, sickness and suffering, but the Cross is never really absent. A more authentic response is to sympathise and not be afraid to share in the suffering of others. By acting with compassion we come close to the other, and can truly touch life's depths. Here we find meaning of life and authentic happiness by coming to the aid of those who suffer.

Q. Are you able to share a time in which you have suffered with others and which allowed you to ‘touch life’s depths?’ How was Jesus present there?

HOLINESS IS: HUNGERING AND THIRSTING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”

Jesus calls us to yearn for justice, for at some point, justice will come. Many suffer injustice by looking on while others divvy up the good things in life. Again, Jesus' way of justice is at odds with the world and its corruption and manipulations. He calls us to pursue justice for the poor, weak and most vulnerable; and to be just in our decisions every day.

Q. In what ways do you express a hunger for justice in your life?

HOLINESS IS: SEEING AND ACTING WITH MERCY

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy”

Pope Francis shows us two aspects of mercy: firstly to give, help and serve others, and secondly to forgive others, summing it up in the golden rule, “in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you”. When we forgive, we participate in some small measure in God's own perfection. We should see ourselves as an ‘army of the forgiven’, as ones who have been looked upon with divine compassion, and should look on others with compassion in the same way.

Q. Do I have a sense of being “looked upon with divine compassion” by God? How does this make me feel?

How might this understanding allow me to be able to forgive others?

HOLINESS IS: KEEPING A HEART FREE OF ALL THAT TARNISHES LOVE

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”

The heart is where our real intentions and what we truly desire are found. We need to guard our hearts from what is deceitful, impure and insincere. God looks to our heart, and wishes to give us a new heart, pure, undefiled, and capable of love. Whilst bad intentions can proceed from the heart and lead to bad actions, a pure heart is one that genuinely loves God and our brothers and sisters, not just in words. The extent to which this love prevails allows us to see God.

Q. How well do I guard my heart from what is harmful and which does not allow me to love?

HOLINESS IS: SOWING PEACE ALL AROUND US

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”

Jesus sent his disciples out to bring peace, and so we too are urged to work for peace and unity. Peacemakers build peace and friendship in society, and the reward is indeed great - to be called children of God. Bringing peace, though, is not always easy, and in our day-to-day, the simple act of gossiping, for example, can be quite destructive. We need to be ‘artisans of peace’, a craft that demands creativity, sensitivity, skill, and an openness of heart. It means embracing everyone, even the most difficult, and resolving conflict so as to make possible a new way forward.

Q. How do I go about being a peacemaker in my day-to-day life? Is there a situation in my life where I am called to bring peace?

HOLINESS IS: ACCEPTING DAILY THE PATH OF THE GOSPEL, EVEN THOUGH IT MAY CAUSE US PROBLEMS

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

The path of the Gospel that Jesus proposes to us is not an easy one. Worldly interests and the structures of society get in our way of living the Gospel, and our attempts can be met with suspicion and ridicule. Many people are indeed persecuted in the struggle to live a life of love and justice, from being slandered to the shedding of blood. We are reminded that the Cross remains an inevitable part of the journey, but is the source of our growth and sanctification.

Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for “whoever would save his life will lose it” (Mt 16:25). (GE, 90)

Q. What difficulties have you encountered in the living out of the Gospel? Is it worth it?

IN FIDELITY TO JESUS

If we seek the holiness that is pleasing to God, the works of mercy, as outlined in Matthew chapter 25, give us a criterion with which to judge our progress:

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (vv. 35-36).

Holiness is not just about mystical experiences, but also about contemplating Christ and recognising him in the poor and suffering in whom he wished to be identified.

Here we see the heart of Christ which we seek to imitate. We find that mercy is the “beating heart of the Gospel.” *Holiness involves a deep recognition of the dignity of each human being*. Pope Francis gives us the following example:

“If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being?” (GE, 98)

This leads Christians to a healthy unease at the evident need for just social and economic systems. In this regard, Pope Francis specifically mentions the welcome and hospitality offered to migrants.

Living the Gospel authentically needs to hold together both a relationship with the Lord and actions of mercy and justice - we shouldn’t separate the purely spiritual with the practical action. Whilst our prayer and worship is primary, to truly grow in holiness we are called to be tenacious in our practice of the works of mercy, especially towards the underprivileged.

Being too concerned only with ourselves and obsessed with our own pleasure means that we can find it hard to show any real concern for those in need. We may find that we need to cultivate a simpler and less consumerist life, and not be so caught up with superficial information and virtual reality which wastes precious time and can leave us indifferent to others.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

Q. How much of the expression of my faith lies in prayer and worship, versus action in the works of mercy?

Q. Do I share an unease with unjust social and economic systems? How might I work towards justice in these areas?

Q. How can I foster within myself a greater recognition of the dignity of each human person?

Q. Is there a space in my life to care for those in need and practice the works of mercy?



ST TERESA OF CALCUTTA

Saint Teresa of Calcutta realised that growth in holiness involved practicing the works of mercy:

"Yes, I have many human faults and failures... But God bends down and uses us, you and me, to be his love and his compassion in the world; he bears our sins, our troubles and our faults. He depends on us to love the world and to show how much he loves it. If we are too concerned with ourselves, we will have no time left for others".

Q. How do I express my concern for others?

JOURNALING – WORKING AT HOLINESS IN MY LIFE

- What has spoken to me deeply during this reflection time?
- How do I see Jesus and my relationship with him differently?
- What is one new insight I have gained about holiness in my life?
- What is one thing I can practice this week as a result of my reflection?

At the end of your journaling time, you may wish to share your insights with each other in the group

[illegible]

FINAL PRAYER

Glory Be to the Father,
and to the Son, and to the
Holy Spirit. As it was in the
beginning, is now, and ever
shall be, world without end.
Amen.

Office for
Evangelisation

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY