

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

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

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

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

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

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

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

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

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

REFLECTION 1: THE KING’S SPEECH

The year 2023 (Year A of the 3 Year Cycle of Readings) focuses our attention on the Gospel of St. Matthew. In his account of the Baptism of Jesus, the Evangelist shows us that the hour has struck, that the call to action has come and Jesus must go forward on his crusade. Matthew goes on to show us Jesus selecting those who will be his fellow workers. However, if helpers and assistants are to do their work effectively and intelligently, they must first have instruction. Today in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 1-12), Matthew shows us Jesus instructing his disciples in the message which is his, and which they were to bring to the people. For that reason, one scholar called the Sermon on the Mount, 'The Ordination Address to the Twelve'.

Here we have the essence of the teaching of Jesus to the inner circle of his chosen Apostles. The Sermon on the Mount is much more than one Sermon; it is in fact a summary of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached. Jesus may have taken the Twelve away to a quiet place for a week or two and instructed them on the heart of his teachings. Notice the opening sentence in today's Gospel, 'Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them'. There are clues to the significance of the Sermon on the Mount here. 'Jesus began to teach when he sat down' - when a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially, he sat to teach. We still speak of the professor's chair and the Pope speaks 'ex cathedra', from his seat - Jesus sits on the cathedra of Moses, he sits there as the Greater Moses. Matthew adds that when Jesus spoke, he 'opened his mouth'. This indicates a solemn, grave and dignified utterance. Jesus is opening his heart here to those who were to be at his right hand in his task of salvation. The Sermon on the Mount is nothing less than the concentrated memory of the many hours of communion between the disciples and their Master.

There are three elements in this summary of Jesus's activity, a summons to repentance, the calling of the Twelve Apostles and clarifying that Jesus is not just the teacher, but also the Redeemer of the whole person. The Jesus who teaches is at the same time the Jesus who saves. This new goodness of the Lord is no sugarplum. The scandal of the cross is harder for many to bear than the thunder of Sinai had been for the Israelites. The Sermon on the Mount is a description of the character traits of Jesus himself - and so, it is an invitation to us to imitate his teaching and example in our lives. With his help and grace we can become more like him. What God has asked us to do is a preparation for eternity.