

DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR 4th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

From St Matthew, we hear the jewel of the Gospel, the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are the blueprint for the kingdom of God. They are the ideals by which God's people should live out their lives. And the best example of living out the Beatitudes, is Jesus' own life.

In his living out the Beatitudes, Jesus gives up power and prestige, in order to follow the way of the powerless. He is gentle and compassionate, with those whom the world rights off as hopeless cases. He mourns, when he sees people prefer blindness, when God is in their presence. He experiences hunger, not the hunger satisfied by food, but the hunger for what is right. He scandalises the religious authorities, but is always ready, with mercy and forgiveness. He is single minded in pursuing his mission of making peace between God and humanity, undeterred, in times of hurt and terror. In the end he is abused, persecuted, and handed over to death, dying on the Cross, for what he believes in.

Jesus calls those people who live out these ideals, "blessed" and "happy" but in the eyes of the world, they can hardly be described as lucky or fortunate people. Because these people are the lowly, the mourners, those deprived of justice, those who are persecuted, and abused.

Jesus warns them, of the cost of living out such ideals. They are the same costs that the prophets paid in the past. But, to those who pay the price, he promises great joy and great reward.

St Matthew tells us that the ones who live out these ideals, are the ones who light up the truth of the Gospel. And, that the kingdom of God belongs to all who are poor in Spirit, to all who hunger for justice and to all those who weep, because of the evil in the world, and of personal sin.

The prophet Zephaniah tells us that the humble and lowly are the ones who find refuge and shelter in the Lord.

And St Paul warns us, not to be puffed up by our own wisdom, because God has the habit of choosing what is weak and foolish, by human standards.

In all three readings, we hear that God prefers the nobodies of this world. And that he uses those who are nothing, to show up all those, who are everything by this world's standards.

St Matthew is describing what happens to Christians when the Kingdom of God breaks into the world. He describes what the followers of Christ will have to experience when they struggle to live out the Gospel, and in turn, live out the Beatitudes. Their struggles may seem senseless suffering to the world, but Jesus says that this suffering is good, and he heaps blessings on those who struggle for their faith.

Do any of us like pain and suffering? I know I don't. I'm allergic to pain. That's why I don't like dentists or doctors. However sometimes pain is unavoidable, it is part and parcel of life.

Christians, down through the centuries, have died for what they believe in. Many of the early Christians ended up as the main course for hungry lions. Just look at how many of the saints were martyrs. And, today, hundreds of Christians are martyred in Nigeria, Syria and Pakistan.

Closer to home, look how many Catholics in England died because they opposed the reformation, and then, were persecuted for 400 years. Oh yes, parliament passed the Catholic Emancipation Act, but do we really have religious freedom. Just look at some of the recent laws that come in to being, it gives a new meaning to the saying, the devil is in the detail.

It is now the time when Christians should stand up and be counted. The devil's weapon is for us to do **nothing**. Keep quiet, keep our heads down, retreat to our comfort zone, and hope no-one knows that we are Catholic Christians.

Just look around, who will be sitting here in 10 or 20 years time. Who will be filling our Church? Where are the people who will be taking our places? They have not arrived yet. Because, they are out there, waiting for us to bring them in.

We are the new Anawim. **We**, that is, both clergy **and** laity, are the ones who are called to grow the Church. That does not mean that we should all rush off and become street evangelists. **No!**, the way we will succeed, is the same way as Jesus did, we should live out the Beatitudes.

The early Church succeeded, not because of eloquent preaching by the Apostles. It succeeded because of the way the early Christians lived out their lives. People saw how they **lived** and **loved**, and they wanted to be part of it. They wanted to be members of the loving family called "The Way". "The Way" being the name by which the early Church was known.

Story – The Ready Brek boys. Some are now married, with children and grandchildren, and some are missionaries and some are priests. For me, those teenage boys lived out the Beatitudes. And it had life changing effect on me.

Living out the Beatitudes, will incur some pain, but you will be "blessed" and "happy". Because Jesus said so.