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## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 29 January 2023

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# 29 January 2023

## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

### Introduction

Today's readings speak of an evaluation of worth that is inverse to typical human reckoning. It is not the rich, powerful and mighty that are automatically blessed with happiness. Rather, it is the humble, the poor and the persecuted, especially those who are such on account of their faithfulness to God who are the truly blessed. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven!

### Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you call us to be happy in spirit. Lord have mercy.

You are the peacemaker and Son of God. Christ have mercy.

You invite us into the kingdom. Lord have mercy.

### Collect

*The oration*

Grant us, Lord our God,

that we may honour you with all our mind,

and love everyone in truth of heart.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever and ever.

Sunday 4 has us praying one of the most interesting collects in the entire missal. It also defies translators' attempts to capture the original intention of the text and the audacity of its execution. The oration is a play on the Gospel imperative to love God and neighbour and retains most of the vocabulary of the text in its Vulgate Latin translation. Yet this clear reference is deliberately transformed into a prayer that petitions for us to 'honour' God with all our heart, soul and mind, and love all human beings with the warming love of the Holy Spirit.

The oration is from the pen of Gelasius I, and was first prayed in the papal mass of Sunday January 29, 495. The pope was leading the people to reject the celebration of the ancient and traditional Roman pagan festival of Lupercalia. The festivities were marked by seduction, drunkenness and defamation. Hence the admonition to love all with true Christian love. The petition to honour, with a strong sense of worship, well reflects the need to assert that the only source of grace is Christ. Authentic love of God requires true worship. And the reference to love that is 'true of heart' is a subtle reminder, lost in any translation, that the new Rome is founded on Peter and Paul who have displaced the mythical twins Romulus and Remus.

In effect the prayer teaches the key to inculturation: every action must be judged by its compatibility with authentic worship and by the unboundedness of its love. All commandments follow from this.

### **Acknowledgement**

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

## **First Reading**

### **Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12–13**

Some during the history of Israel tended to equate material prosperity with divine blessing. Zephaniah's words point in a different direction. It is those who are humble and seek their refuge in the Lord who receive divine blessing. It is the lowly and the poor who set their eyes to God who are truly blessed.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

### **Psalm 146(145):6-10. R. Matt 5:3**

*Happy the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!*

The Psalm praises the Lord who lifts up the lowly, who never leaves the orphaned abandoned.

## **Second Reading**

### **1 Corinthians 1:26–31**

Paul speaks of the limitation of human wisdom as God chooses what we assume is insignificant to show the true glory of God. It is a reminder that we have nothing to boast for on our own accord. All that is worthwhile truly comes from God.

## **Gospel Reading**

### **Matthew 5:1–12**

The Beatitudes present a collection of ways that we can live the blessings of God. Those who humbly seek the will of God will be assured of lasting happiness.

## Reflection

The Beatitudes that we hear in today's gospel reading opens the famous Sermon on the Mount where Jesus offers a lengthy teaching on the sorts of virtues and actions that accord with finding true happiness and blessings. Though the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes are relatively well-known terms, some are occasionally confused and think that the Beatitudes we hear in today's Gospel and the Sermon on the Mount are the same thing – as if the series of 'happy are they' statements form the whole of Jesus' important discourse. However, it is but the opening, an important opening as we will reflect on momentarily but, nevertheless, only part of a wider teaching that forms chapters five to seven of Matthew's Gospel.

We will hear many of the other parts of the Sermon in coming weeks. Next Sunday we will hear of salt and light, then on the Law of the scriptures, on adultery and divorce, on retaliation and love of enemies, and on God and money. There are also teachings that we will not hear during our Sunday liturgies in coming weeks but are, nonetheless, well known and much admired. Some examples include lessons on almsgiving (6:1-4), fasting (6:16-18), judging others (7:1-5) and on false prophets (7:15-20) as well as the seminal instruction on prayer featuring the Lord's Prayer (6:5-14) and the near ubiquitously known 'Golden Rule' (7:12). These collections of teachings are some of the most inspiring among Jesus' many words of life. However, they are also among the most difficult. Indeed, included in the Sermon we find Jesus reminding would be followers that the road is difficult. The pathway of living the way of the Kingdom is a 'narrow gate' and, in contrast, the life that leads to destruction is 'wide and easy' and, not surprisingly given it is wide and easy, 'many people take it' (Matt 7:13-14).

When we hold that broader teaching of Jesus in view and, further, when we reflect on what it really means to follow Jesus, we find a greater sense of what the Beatitudes offer us. When Jesus looked out among the crowd gathered to hear his words of life, he no doubt saw people struggling to live the 'difficult road' of God's ways. He also was well aware of the price of discipleship that he was calling his particular followers to take.

Times have changed significantly in the approximately two thousand years between when those words were uttered and our world today, but the 'narrow road' is just as difficult. We live in a world where to lie and cheat is sport for many and certainly not a hindrance to the wealth and power that fraudulence can allow. To be pious can be seen as weak and, in some quarters at least, insignificant or unwanted. To chase monetary gain as a supreme goal is considered the norm and to truly live for others is a quaint but unrealistic notion at best. It is not hard to find places where we are encouraged to caricature our enemies rather than see them as vulnerable human beings worthy of due attention much less to love and forgive them. It is relatively easy to find in popular discourse those who are pridefully self-assured to the point of arrogance and just as easy to witness a world comfortably able to ignore the plight of the poor and disenfranchised. In contrast, the teachings of Christ seem to require a humility, to recognise our limitations coupled with a bold and restless dissatisfaction at the injustice we see all around us.

To live the sort of life that Jesus is about to speak to in the Sermon, to attempt to follow the ways of God which such teachings reflect is not only difficult, but also, at times at least, lonely and mournful. Jesus repeats nine times 'happy are those' who are just such people. The more commonly used adjective translation of the original Greek *makarios* is the English 'blessed' as it attempts to capture the transcendent lasting happiness that *makarios* imports. The Latin word *beatitudo* is where we get the English 'beatitudo' and typically translates as 'happy' but, even so, the Latin term is loaded and rich in understanding. It is indeed a happiness that God is offering, but it is not simply a happiness of the senses. Clearly not because it seems obvious that simple sensory happiness can come a lot easier than attempting to be 'peacemakers', for example, and certainly a lot easier than being 'persecuted for the cause of right'.

However, this happiness that Jesus speaks of cannot come the easy way and is certainly not fleeting or temporary. It is a state of being where one is in accord with the very will of the mind of the Creator. It is a happiness that is of the soul that may spill out to material and sensory experience but is not dependent on it.

Naturally, we hear resonance of the Beatitudes in the first reading. Zephaniah refers to the blessing of the humble and lowly which echoes the meek and the poor of Matthew. However, Zephaniah is describing such figures as a faithful remnant. The idea of a remnant is a repeated theme in the Hebrew scriptures. Part of the notion is that, even when the people of God suffer greatly and become scattered and disconnected from their place, community and their God, there is always a remnant that will remain. A group of faithful who provide both a sign and means to restoration and of healing to all the people of God.

We may find the path that Jesus is talking of difficult in all sorts of ways. It may also sometimes seem that few are bothered with the seemingly less attractive ways of Christ. But God is still calling and enabling great men and women to live the 'blessed life', the truly 'happy life'. We are all called to be among them and, if we feel we're waning ourselves, we can look to that faithful remnant, the 'humble and lowly' who model to us the lasting blessedness of God.





# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

Jesus gave us the beatitudes, so let us keep in mind those who need the blessings of God as we gather together to pray for our Church and the world.

## Petitions

We pray for a blessing upon the Leaders of the Church. May they become blessed through their care of the poor and have the courage to suffer in Christ's name.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our nation's leaders, that they may be granted the wisdom and discernment necessary to make the right decisions for our country; choices that acknowledge the presence of God on our world.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the missionaries who have dedicated their lives to saving the poor as they seek to spread the message of Christ's love and forgiveness.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have recently undergone surgery or are suffering serious illness. May they make a full recovery and may this community be a blessing to them in the way that they are offered care and support.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those in the local community who are struggling with financial difficulties. May they continue to place their hope in God, trusting in his unfailing goodness and have the courage to take the narrow road.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are grieving for loved ones, lost to them through death or separation. May they be comforted by those who care.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

Father, we humbly ask that you hear our prayers and grant our petitions. Hear us, through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1
All creatures of our God and king			618	446	
Alleluia, sing to Jesus	191	371	619	449	
Christ is the world's light			643	467	
Christians, lift up your hearts			650	355	
Church of God		480	652	471	
Lead me, Lord					107
Lord of creation, to you be all praise		423	739	543	
O breathe on me, O breath of God		432	758	564	
Rejoice the Lord is King			799	377	
Seek, O seek the Lord		211	802	595	
Tell out my soul		550		213	
The Beatitudes (Kearney)		489	817	456	
The Beatitudes (Russian Orthodox Chant)				563	
We are the light of the world					143

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 145: *Happy the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!/Alleluia!*

	CWB	JOBA	LPA
Psalm 145	358	pg. 12	pg. 86

## Music selections by Michael Mangan

**Heaven shall be yours (TWB)** based on Mt 5:1-12 (*Beatitudes*)