

SERMON 827

Holy Eucharist I with Prayers for Healing

Wednesday, February 5, 2014

931st Week as Priest

757th Week at St Dunstan's

22nd Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

BEATITUDES

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once again, our Lord seems to turn the world upside down. He says and does the unexpected thing. He reverses the established order. He calls us to see with new eyes, to hear with new ears. He challenges our presumptions about life, and he calls us to change.

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

Our society, our culture, places such strong emphasis on being happy, on pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, that being poor in spirit seems unacceptable and embarrassing. But the truth is that Christ promises us eternal life even though our present life may be overwhelming, discouraging, and unworkable. Your life is not just what it is at present; there is more than meets the eye—yours will be the kingdom of heaven.

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

We know this beatitude firsthand. Many of us have known the “pitch past pitch of grief” that comes with the death of a spouse, a child, a dear friend. We know the loss, and we also know that grief is not unchristian. Even Jesus himself wept at the grave of Lazarus. But in time, little by little, we come to see that there is a way through. And we find comfort in quiet talk, and friendship, and prayer, and the community of the faithful.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

The world, of course, tells us that this is not true. Only the strong survive. It’s a dog-eat-dog world. Look out for Number One. And if you don’t, you’ll lose everything you’ve got. Jesus himself was the Meek King. Meekness, you see, is not weakness or cowardice—not at all. No, meekness is a calm and patient way of facing life because you carry in your heart and mind a sense of purpose. Life is not just what it appears to be; no, there is much more to you and me than meets the eye.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

This is a beatitude that I can truly grab hold of! I’ve always been one of those who has hungered and thirsted for righteousness, for the life of faith, for the spiritual gifts of wisdom and understanding. But along the way it has helped me tremendously to realize that we are called to righteousness, not to perfection. Righteousness means trying, striving to live life faithfully. Just keep trying, and eventually you will be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

It's the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” If you are merciful, you will find that others show mercy to you. If you are cruel and heartless, selfish and judgmental, then expect to receive the same treatment. As you sow, so shall you reap. Bishop Stough used to say, “Whenever you are faced with a choice between justice and mercy, always try to choose mercy. Choose mercy.”

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

I want to see God. I want to walk as a child of the light. But I know I'm a long way from being pure in heart. The ancient people of Israel believed that you would die if you ever looked into the face of God. It's probably true. Some things are simply too wonderful for us to accept, to endure. Perhaps this beatitude belongs in heaven, where we believe that we will, finally, be able to see God face to face. I hope so. I want to be pure in heart. I want to see God one day.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

I don't know that I'm a very good peacemaker, but I certainly want peace in my life, and in your life, and in the life of our community. We greet one another with words of peace every Wednesday. I sign all my letters, “Peace be with you.” I'll often say, “Peace,” when I say goodbye to you. I don't like conflict, or anger, or division. I like peace and joy and harmony. So that's it: Peace be with you.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men 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 so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.’

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth has truly turned the world upside down. The condemnation of the world, the forum of public opinion, the conventional wisdom of the day—all these things mean nothing compared with the surpassing love of Jesus Christ our Lord. It’s just like Saint Paul told us ... do not be conformed to this world; rather be transformed by the renewal of your mind. And when you find yourself lied about, misrepresented, taken advantage of—don’t retaliate. Those lies and false acts have no power over you. Rather, rejoice and be glad! This has happened before. Evil men’s ways do prosper—but not always and for ever. The good wins out. Jesus shall reign over all the earth. And that, dear friends, is good news for us all. **AMEN.**