

Jubilee 2018

During the course of his public ministry, Jesus undoubtedly repeated himself over and over again. After all, he preached to different crowds in various places and across an extended period of time. Like a politician seeking office (excuse the comparison!), Jesus must have had a few "**stump speeches**" to which he returned with some frequency, so that he could lay a common foundation of teaching for those who were to become his disciples. CNN and FOX News were not there to capture the "**STUMP SPEECHES**" of Jesus, but fortunately, Matthew was.

At the heart of Jesus' preaching is the **Sermon on the Mount**. Jesus' message that day on that mountainside has touched the lives of countless men and women of faith and even those of little or no faith. "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who are mourning, blessed are the meek, the gentle of heart."

The key for unlocking the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount is simply this: **Jesus is the man of the beatitudes**. In reflecting over the life stories of our honored Jubilarians, The women that we honor today, each in her own way, have been and continue to be **Women of the Beatitudes**.

To follow Jesus is to become a person of the beatitudes. Jesus teaches his disciples that to live a life in union with him they must not only avoid sin - this is already fully articulated in the Ten Commandments, which remain perennially valid - **but must lead a new kind of life**: One that is firmly rooted in the Kingdom of God a kingdom which is built on love and respect, for self and for others and for all of God's creation.

The Beatitudes teach us how to follow Christ in living as members of his eternal Kingdom.

Poverty of spirit leads one to recognize that the greatest good available to humankind is to lead a life rooted in God. This is the virtue that orients our desires to eternal life. God calls the weak in the world to shame the strong. God chooses the lowly and despised. God chooses not those who are wise to worldly standards, but those who are humble, detached, and sensitive to spiritual things.

The humble, the detached, the sensitive to spiritual things—these are the "poor in spirit," and theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It is not that the poor in spirit must be poor in spirit first before they can follow Jesus. These beatitudes are not entrance requirements or spiritual gymnastics that lead to being disciples. **All of God's human**

creatures have in them the capacity to be humble, detached, and sensitive to spiritual things. All creatures can be poor in spirit.

On the day following the historic meeting for peace in the Vatican several years ago, with the Israeli and Palestinian Presidents, Pope Francis called for the **“courage of meekness to defeat hatred”**.

Reflecting on the Gospel reading of the day which focuses on the Beatitudes, Pope Francis described them as a “the **“identity card of a Christian”**”.

How quick are we to pull out our **VISA** cards, **MASTERCARDS** and for some of us, **NOT SO QUICK** to pull out our **MEDICARE CARDS** —- but are we equally as quick in pulling out our **CHRISTIAN IDENTIFICATION CARDS**?

“If you ask yourself how to become a good Christian, this is where you can find Jesus’s answer, an answer,” he said, “that points to an attitude that is currently very much against the tide: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit. But the poor in spirit can take solace in the words of Mary’s great Magnificat: they will be around to see the mighty and powerful cast down from their thrones.***”

A spirit of mourning helps to reorder one's life according to what is most essential and lasting. It opens a person to the discovery of how God accompanies us in all the circumstances of life. **All creatures can mourn. Not all do, we know quite clearly. But all can.**

All have the potential to be sympathetic and compassionate, and have an acute sense of the tragedy of life—for that it what it means to mourn; such mourners do not merely recognize tragedy and do nothing else, but they pray, they intercede: and they are comforted knowing that God is a loving God, who loves all who are suffering, loves all in calamity, loves all in any pain or grief—**those who mourn ask God to grant God’s healing grace to all who are sick, injured, or disabled, that they may be made whole.**

To thirst for righteousness orients Jesus' disciples to a love of authentic justice, the first principle of which is to give to God the love and honor due to our Divine Creator.

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness”. Jesus says: “Blessed are they who fight against injustice. Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy”. The merciful are those who forgive and understand the mistakes of others. Jesus does not say “blessed are they who seek revenge”.

Speaking of this Beatitude, author and peace activist, John Dear wrote in his book **Transfiguration**: **“For me, it sums up Christianity. If we do this, we will obey Jesus fully, because it encompasses everything -- reflecting God's universal love, working for disarmament, seeking justice for the poor, practicing forgiveness, living in hope and trusting in the God of peace. I've long considered it the most radical, political, revolutionary words ever uttered.”**

He goes on to answer the question: Why? Because they go against everything every nation teaches. The whole world is based on the commandment: hate your enemies, punish your enemies, kill your enemies. Jesus reverses the entire nation/state system. He invites us not to hate, punish or kill anyone, especially those targeted by our nation/state. Needless to say, this means, he would want us to love, not kill, the people of Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine, Colombia, North Korea, Russia, and any other people the U.S. military has targeted.”

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness”. How many people, Pope Francis has said, have been persecuted, “and continue to be persecuted simply for having fought for justice”. Jesus was not preaching hopeless idealism. He advocated a wise strategy for living in peace. **“Love for enemies is the key to the solution of the problems of our world,”** Dr. Martin Luther King wrote. **“Jesus is not an impractical idealist; he is the practical realist.”** Our responsibility as Christians is to discover the meaning of this command and seek passionately to live it out.” Nelson Mandela put it this way: **“I have never yet met an enemy whom I did not try to turn into a friend.”**

My brothers and sisters, we can never forget that **the blessing of peace orders one's life according to the sacrifice of the Cross - the source of true peace**. Allowing the peace of Christ to reign in one's heart is a condition of living as a child of God and living as a Sister of St. Joseph of Peace and as an associate. As Constitution 15 of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace states: **“Our call to peacemaking perme-**

ates all aspects of our lives together. It seeks expression in mutual love and concern. It challenges us to accept and share our gifts to empower others to do likewise. It pervades our prayer and it calls us to a life of simplicity and service.”

It is inconceivable to so many that even persecution for the sake of Christ is presented as a blessing. So many people reviled the Lord, especially as he hung upon the Cross. **When we share in this condition, we are especially united with the saving grace that flows from it.** At various times in your history as a Congregation misunderstandings and persecutions have taken place but the community has stayed the course and followed the brave example of Mother Clare, Sr. Evangelista and those other Women of the Beatitudes who have gone before you.

We do well to remember that God is active and present everywhere and in all places. We cannot escape God's guiding hand even if we wanted to. God is always reaching out God's loving arms to us from the cross, always wanting to bring us closer to His Loving and most Sacred Heart. Being able through grace to find Jesus in even one person on a given day is a tremendous gift. Each time we find Jesus in another person, the peace of Christ grows in the world. All people can be peacemakers.,

Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with images of salt and light. His words challenge all of us gathered here today in this place. Live seasoned lives, he tells us - let your light shine for all the world to see.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, the Beatitudes open a path for each follower of Christ and it challenges us to be men and women of the beatitudes.

I believe this path has been so totally and joyfully embraced by the Women whom we honor today. They have lived their lives faithfully as **Women of the Beatitudes**, as **Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace**; they indeed have been salt and light to those they have encountered along the journey. Whether spending their lives as teachers here in NJ, Connecticut, California or Washington State, they have touched the lives of countless thousands of children and parents with their kindness, their patience, the compassion and their presence, their joy and their laughter.

They have spread the message of the Good News to the peoples of Africa and India, and Ireland, and yes, even that far off exotic place, Jersey City. As Directors of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministers in Parishes and other settings, they have laughed and rejoiced with the in moments of great joy, and have wept with the brokenhearted.

They have made their voices heard amongst those who would rather not hear the voices of the poor, the marginalized, the mentally ill, the substance abuser, battered woman, the neglected child, the lonely and oft time abandoned elderly. Their voices have cried out, their feet have **marched for and demanded justice** not only for all of God's People but also for God's Creation, this place that we call home. They have been salt and light and undoubtedly, perhaps unknown to us, have suffered the persecution that Jesus speaks about in the Sermon on the Mount.

I would like to conclude with the following words of blessing.

On February 7, 1999, Sr. Chris professed her vows as a Sister of St. Joseph of Peace after spending many years as a Sister of St. Joseph, Third order of St. Francis. That afternoon, Sr. Noreen Twomey, CSJP shared a beautiful prayer of blessing for the occasion. I was deeply touched when I read it. Perhaps it will ring fresh to those of you who were there that day and those hearing these words for the first time.

We end with words of gratitude and blessing — for all of our Jubilarians, those present among us, Agnes, Clara, Cecilia, Judy, Chris, and Margaret, those celebrating in other areas of the Congregation; Monica Heeran, Elizabeth Linnane, Mary Theresa Sheridan, Mary Thorne and especially remembering Sr. Mary Donohue and Sr. Camillus Elliott who went home to the Lord two weeks ago and we are sure celebrating with us in heaven:

May the blessing of faith ground you,

The nurturance of community sustain you,

The cloak of peace protect you,

And may God continue to ripen in you,

Bringing you to fullness of bloom,

Watering daily the soil of your life. Amen!

Jim McDonald, CSJP-Associate