

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

We live in a society where successful people and heroic persons are praised and honored. Following the trend of our culture and society, we all want to become heroes and successful in what we undertake. In fact, there is nothing wrong in being heroic or successful. The problem rises only when all that leads to self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction. Self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction, in turn, lead to unmeasured pride that forgets God and considers the human being as the ground of everything.

The people of Israel had run the same risk to the point that the prophet Zephaniah had to remind them to seek first the Lord and to stay humble. They had to seek justice and humility, because God loves the humble and the lowly. If they act in such a way, they would be protected on the Day of Judgment and blessed by the Lord.

These words of the prophet teach us, first, that God has to be put above everything else we undertake in this world. Second, they raise our mind to the religious truth that to be successful or to be considered as a hero in this world does not mean necessarily to be happy. If that is the case, then the criteria of happiness is different whether our happiness is grounded on God or on purely human success.

All that helps us understand today's Gospel as Jesus is proposing to us the criteria of happiness which is very different from the usual way we consider what it means to be happy.

The sermon of Jesus on the mountain, which we usually call the beatitudes, is a way of life and a summary of Jesus' message on the Kingdom of heaven. It is a conversation of heart to heart in which Jesus pours out his heart to us, his disciples, by telling us the way we have to walk toward the kingdom of his Father.

The beatitudes describe a joy that has its secret within itself because its source is in God. Because its source is in God, such a joy is untouchable and independent of human circumstances and the changes of life. Human happiness, in fact, is something which depends on the chances and the changes in life. It is something life may give, but is also something life may destroy. Think, for instance, of a change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition, even a change in the weather. All that can take away the joy the world can give us.

Christian happiness, however, is untouchable and indestructible, because according to the words of Jesus, "No one can take away your Joy" (John 16, 22). That is why the beatitudes speak of a joy that comes even in pain and suffering, a joy which sorrows and grief cannot destroy, a joy which shines through tears and nothing in this life can take away.

If we understand all that, it becomes clear that the happiness proposed in the beatitudes is not an expression of simple and pious wishes about the future, but rather an outcome of a process we have already started right now as we journey in life and in this world with

Jesus. Of course, this joy will find its fullness and its consummation in the presence of God at the end of time, but nonetheless, it is a reality we can enjoy right now by our acceptance of Jesus.

That is why anytime we strive for spiritual poverty, we are building the kingdom of heaven where God will enrich us who put our material and worldly success at the feet of Jesus.

Anytime we mourn for God's sake, we are sure that we will be comforted, because that day God will wipe away every tear from our face.

Anytime we work hard in order to change our character in becoming meek, gentle and kind, we are preparing our heritage, because by striving for purity we will that day see God.

Anytime, we spend our energy to work for justice and peace between families, peoples and nations, we are building God's kingdom, because that day we will be recognized as God's children.

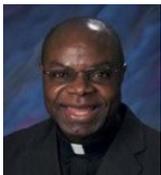
Anytime we forgive the wrong done to us and we allow others to reconcile with us and with one another, we prepare God's blessing on us, because that day God will in turn be merciful toward us.

Anytime we accept to be insulted, persecuted and slandered because of Jesus, we have to rejoice and be glad, because that day we will be rewarded for our fidelity.

Is not this way of happiness that Jesus proposes seemingly foolish? Well, that is exactly what St Paul says, namely that God has chosen what seems to be foolish in the world in order to shame the wise, what is weak in the world in order to shame the strong, and what is lowly and despised in the world in order to reduce to nothing those who are something so that no human being may boast before God.

Let us ask Jesus to help us embrace the way of the beatitudes so that we come one day to the Kingdom of his Father. Let us ask him to help us to be humble by grounding everything we do in this world on his Father and not on ourselves. May God bless you all!

Zephaniah 2, 3; 3, 12-13; 1 Corinthians 1, 26-31; Matthew 5, 1-12a



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