

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on Hearing the Beatitudes Anew

Date: February 1, 2026

Sunday: 4th Sunday of the Year (A cycle)

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

By: Fr. Bob Schmitz

Text: Jesus spoke these words to real people, people in an actual place and time. We have all heard the Beatitudes very often. Believers choose them for funerals and weddings, graduations and on. They are well-worn; it's hard to hear them anew. Matthew, however, reminds us of the real people who heard the Lord. Right before today's Gospel, Matthew writes of the "great crowds" Jesus attracted (4:25).

When Jesus began preaching, times were hard. Rome oppressed Israel by the sword and spear, using soldiers to collect extreme taxes, driving people into poverty, forcing them off their ancestral lands. The religious leadership did not help. Later in the Gospel, Jesus will charge them with laying unnecessary, heavy burdens on believers (chapter 23). The 613 commandments of Law of Moses suffocated them. If broken, many laws carried the penalty of excommunication, at least temporarily. In addition, believers in Galilee met different peoples daily. People from different nations, tribes, religions, values, and norms were rubbing shoulders with each other. The religious leaders told practicing Jews to segregate themselves from Gentiles. Navigating life, finding the way to a good life was grim. In just a couple chapters, on another occasion when Jesus faced a crowd, Matthew tells us Jesus felt pity because people looked troubled and felt abandoned (9:36). Real people in time and place.

Jesus began with the word *Blessed*. Scholars debate whether that's the right translation. The Greek word Matthew chose was a word used to address people "in dire straits." It's hard to feel blessed in such a space. Besides, one scholar said *blessed* is too religious. The scholars tried

other translations. One is *happy*; but then, you still have the desperation. Another translates *blessed* as *fortunate*, but fortunate has overtones of luck. Galileans did not feel lucky.

In my meditations, I thought about St. Paul's assessment of his life and ministry when he was near martyrdom. He wrote to his friend Timothy: "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Satisfaction and contentment become possible if one has kept the faith while running the good race. So, when Jesus began to preach, he may have communicated contentment and satisfaction. Be satisfied, be content if you remain poor in spirit—able to give what you have received, sharing what you have with those in greater need. Be content if you remain poor in spirit during hard economic times. You are in God's kingdom, and you will experience the fullness of that kingdom.

Be satisfied, be content if you mourn—if you remain compassionate to others, if you remain empathetic, willing to suffer with those who suffer. Be satisfied when you mourn with others when you yourself are exhausted by life. You are in God's kingdom and in God's time you will find comfort.

Keeping the faith while navigating difficult moments results in satisfaction and contentment. Remaining a decent, caring, forgiving, loving person in troubled situations is the measure of authentic followers of the Crucified God.

How often I have heard a common lament from troubled believers. In troubled times, God's plan seems hidden. When we feel unaided by God, we might recoup our inner strength if we reflect on our creation, how we are made, who we are. God created us to be free human persons, free to construct our own lives, build our own communities, relate to each other as well as we can. Being all-powerful, God could have controlled everything. To make us free, God

put the controls in our hands. Then God graces our lives with satisfaction when we relate with care, give what we can, discover the goodness in each other, explore the depth of love. The grace of contentment comes when the path is uncertain, even when conditions are bleak. The mystery of living in God is how to keep the faith as a free person.

The grace of satisfaction flows when we remain active. We need to be the peacemaker, the merciful, the one's hungering for righteousness. Discipleship is active hope. We are the artists and architects for the construction of our lives, for building of our communities, for relating one to another. Inner peace comes by remaining faithful through it all.

Let me take you to the ultimate example of remaining faithful in difficult times, of finding satisfaction and contentment in terrifying moments. We need to switch to St. Luke's Gospel, to Luke's version of the crucifixion. Imagine the pain when soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross and raised the cross to a vertical position. Here's Jesus's response: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Then he mustered the ability to welcome a repentant thief into paradise with him. And then, when he was dying, he prayed these words of perfect contentment in a loud voice for all to hear: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (23:46).

We are free; we must act, construct, build, relate. We must hope. If we live in Christ, we become the blessed, and ours is the kingdom of heaven.