

Readings and Reflection

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time

1st February

First reading Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

'I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly.'

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.

I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

Responsorial Psalm 146(145): 6c-10. R Mat. 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

It is the Lord who preserves fidelity for ever, who does justice to those who are oppressed. It is he who gives bread to the hungry, the Lord who sets prisoners free.

The Lord who opens the eyes of the blind, the Lord who raises up those who are bowed down. It is the Lord who loves the just, the Lord who protects the stranger.

The Lord upholds the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the path of the wicked. The Lord will reign for ever, your God, O Sion, from age to age.

Second reading 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

'God chose what is weak in the world.'

Consider your calling, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

Gospel Acclamation Matthew 5:12a

Alleluia, alleluia.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.
Alleluia.

Gospel Matthew 5: 1-12a

'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'

At that time: Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall

be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others 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.'

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Feast Days this week

Monday 2nd February: The Presentation of the Lord

Tuesday 3rd February: St Blaise

Thursday 5th February: St Agatha

Friday 6th February: St Paul Miki and his Companions

Saturday 7th February: Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Cycle of Prayer Migrants and Refugees

Background

Asylum seekers and refugees — I wish to underline how the tendency is to stop at the question of their arrival while disregarding the reasons for which they left their native land. [Benedict XVI - Message for World Migration day 2005]

Prayer

*Lord, no one is a stranger to you
and no one is ever
far from your loving care.
In your kindness watch over
refugees and exiles,
those separated from their loved ones,
young people who are lost,
and those who have left
or run away from home.
Bring them back safely
to the place where they long to be
and help us always
to show your kindness
to strangers and those in need.*

The beatitudes offer a summary of Jesus' teaching. They are the condensed gospel and need some teasing out to apply them to life. We are aware of political manifestos, statements of what a party stands for, what they intend to achieve if you elect them. This gospel is Jesus' manifesto. It is a manifesto that he promises will bring us near to God.

People who are detached and show gentleness to others, are blessed. Even if they are rich, their money does not make them boastful or proud. Grief is the price we must eventually pay for having loved. If you are determined never to cry at a funeral, don't ever love anyone. The meek and the gentle are the most resilient of people. Good people deeply respect justice and fair play, and try to win them for others. As you treat others, so you will be treated. If we want to receive mercy and compassion, we must show mercy to others. A pure heart is not devious, deceitful, selfish or cunning. Jesus did not say we should be passive. Rather he urges us to build bridges of peace with others.

Jesus warns those who follow him will be treated as he was. There is a cost in Pentecost, and following him means sharing his cross. Right from the beginning when Simeon saw him in the temple, he said that Jesus would be a sign of contradiction. Everything he said and did was a challenge to this world's values. Those with power, prestige, and control felt undermined by his message. The religious leaders who were the arbiters of right and wrong, were so threatened by him that they planned his death.

Those who lament the fewness of "practising Catholics" may have reduced this notion to attendance at Sunday Mass. There is no mention of that in the beatitudes. Jesus simply listed some qualities needed to enter the kingdom of heaven. These "happy attitudes" are the charter of the kingdom. They are ideals that are well-nigh unattainable. They are values to aim at, meant to help us moderate our lifestyles. History produces some people who incarnate these beatitudes, like a Francis of Assisi or a Mother Teresa, or some specially dedicated individuals that we may be privileged to know. As St Paul says, God has made us members of Christ, "who is our wisdom, our virtue, our holiness and our freedom."

There is a cleansing power in the beatitudes. They are about letting go of things that are not life-giving, and about becoming truly free. They offer guidelines for living, for inner peace and happiness. Formal religion can be too tied to rules, rituals and regulations and be authoritarian. Spirituality is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is about letting go, so as to be free in God's sight. associationcatholicpriests.ie