

4th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 5:1-12

Someone once criticised the writer C. S. Lewis for “not caring for the Sermon on the Mount.” He replied, “As to ‘caring for’ the Sermon on the Mount, if ‘caring for’ here means ‘liking’ or enjoying, I suppose no one ‘cares for’ it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledge hammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure” (*God in the Dock*, p. 181-82).

The Lord begins the Sermon on the Mount by setting out his plan for beatitude or, loosely translated, joy. For His original hearers it had a “sledge hammer” effect. In effect, Christ says that through bankruptcy, loss of loved ones, hunger, humiliation, misunderstandings, false accusations and the loss of friends, we can find joy.

It isn't that these things are good in themselves. Unfortunately, some have used the Beatitudes to justify not helping others out of their misery—or to encourage a false hope. But poverty, grief, insults are evils from which we must do our best to protect others and ourselves.

The Beatitudes are one of those great ironies that mark Christianity. Ironies like that a means of torture and death, the Cross, is our means of eternal life, that the very Word of God is written in the rather unsophisticated language of the Bible which many find dull and boring, that the moment that heaven and earth meet, the Eucharist, can be celebrated at any time and in any place, and that God the almighty, the Creator of the universe, was made man and walked amongst us, sharing the same joys and pains, the same mundane and boring days, and the same moments of excitement, that every one of us do.

The concern of the sermon on the mount is not so much the alleviation of suffering but the type of response giving to suffering and the transformation of suffering that gives it meaning.

God, in Christ, suffers and dies with humanity. God is not “above” but “with” humanity, meaning that God in Christ suffers along with men and women. “Only in Christ does the idea of a suffering God appear... Christ, by his teaching [and] life, and death, made plain... the suffering of unrequited and unsuccessful love... What Christians share is their participation in the sufferings of God in Christ. That is faith” and there is joy.