

AUSTRALIA DAY

St. Matthew 5:1-12

Someone once criticised 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, blessing. For His original hearers it had a “sledge hammer” effect. In effect, the Lord says that through bankruptcy, loss of loved ones, hunger, humiliation, misunderstandings, false accusations and the loss of friends, we can find blessings.

It is not 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 resignation. No, poverty, grief, insults are evils from which we must do our best to protect others and ourselves.

Still, those evils will come, even to the rich and successful. What the Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount is that when those things come, if we embrace them for His sake, we will discover true blessings.

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.

On Australia Day, a day honoured by the Church as a Day of Prayer, we recognise the character of Australia and of Australians. This could be no better seen than in the character of the ANZAC soldiers.

In the soldiers of the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps that landed at Gallipoli on the 25th of April, *A.D.* 1915, the forces of freedom fought armies intent on the enslavement of man. In fighting, these men, participated in the salvation of men and women everywhere and for every time to come. The Gallipoli campaign failed, however, and on its own it seems odd to commemorate failure. But the Australian and New Zealand troops' actions during the campaign bequeathed an intangible but powerful legacy. What mattered to the troops was that they fought the powers of evil in the name of King and Country for the liberty of men and women everywhere and for every time to come. What they met with was the death of 8,000 Australians and 2,700 New Zealanders whilst Turkey, an ally of Germany, remained in the war. What resulted was a sign of hope that though the good might lose battles they do not lose the war.

Our Faith is a cacophony of paradoxes. This is what we recognise in the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount and what we recognise, this Australia Day, in the Australian ANZAC soldiers. In signs and symbols of failure and death we see victory and life. This is what we call hope. A gift of the Holy Spirit and a marker that God does not abandon His people even in the midst of utter desolation. Let us pray in thanksgiving to God for the freedoms we enjoy here, and let us pray that we may, by the intercession of the Patroness of Australia, Our Lady, Help of Christians, that we may persevere in defending the dignity of every man and woman, from birth to natural death, so that Australia, the land of the Southern Cross, may be a beacon to the nations and a light to the world.