

4th Sunday Ord. Time (A)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
January 28, 29, 2017

Very familiar Scriptures as in today's Gospel text the Eight Beatitudes offer a special challenge for the preacher; as in, what might be new about a well-recognized text? There are times, however, when I wonder why so many get more excited and protective of the Ten Commandments than they often do about these Eight Beatitudes? After all, the Eight Beatitudes are to Jesus and all of Christianity and the New Testament as the Ten Commandments are to Moses, Judaism, and the entire Old Testament. I find it interesting how many want the Ten Commandments posted but never consider doing the same for the Eight Beatitudes.

“Seek the Lord” -- seek justice, seek humility....
Recognize that God's wisdom leans more toward the weak and the lowly, and even....
that God uses the foolish of the world to shame the strong and the wise of the world.
God chooses the lowly and the weak – those who count for nothing in the world.
These are all words and phrases that we heard in today's Scriptures.

Because today's Scriptures, and particularly the Gospel, are so familiar to us, we often come to them with preconceived ideas. To help us make them fresh and meaningful for us, we need a new set of eyes. And I was aided in this when I found a commentator who reflected on the eyes that Jesus brought to the situation of today's Gospel. I found it quite interesting; it became the basis of my homily.

Picture Jesus going up to a high place on the Mount. He does this, so he can see the large crowd that was gathering. Of course, the groupies/his disciples were all in front. Then others began to fill in as they gathered. And, as is normal, the skeptics were probably hanging around the back edges of the large crowd. So with what eyes did Jesus see the gathering crowd. The commentator suggests that Jesus saw them through 3 different sets of eyes: physical eyes, of course we would assume this

mental eyes, and then spiritual eyes ... maybe we would assume
this also, since we believe Jesus to be God.

Seeing the crowd as a physical act allowed Jesus to notice outward appearances. These are aspects of people that are available to our senses. Seeing the crowd as a physical act allowed Jesus to notice how the crowd was made up of men and women, tall and short people, skinny and fat people, even smelly and fragrant, bearded and shaved people, well-dressed and disheveled individuals. There may be other types noticed as well through the physical act of seeing. Some may have been invalids on pallets/biers.

Seeing the crowd as a mental act of seeing involves an element of evaluation. We see people in terms of the categories the human mind often uses as it evaluates others. In

this sense Jesus would have looked out at the gathering crowd and saw rich and poor, Jews and non-Jews, Pharisees and Sadducees, free and slave, tax collectors and those who had to pay the tax. Maybe here he would have noticed the law-abiding and the criminal also. And then there is seeing or viewing people with spiritual eyes. Viewing people through spiritual eyes allows Jesus to see people in relationship to the Divine Source and in communion with all of creation. And in seeing people this way, many of the former categories begin to fade ... God is Father of all ... all are creatures of the same universe/world.

It is very easy for us to see others at the physical level. And often we catch ourselves viewing others through mental eyes. We evaluate others as we see them: we call this judging them. But it is only when we see others with spiritual eyes that we see them with mercy, with compassion, or with any kind of empathy. Only when we see others with spiritual eyes will we see ourselves as connected to them in any sense. Only with spiritual eyes will we view them as connected to and in relationship with us. It is like when Jesus is told that his mother and brothers are standing outside of the house and wanting to see him, and he says, *“Who is my mother, and brother, and sisters?”* Jesus looks around at those seated within the house and says, *“Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”* (Mk 3:31ff.)

With physical eyes we see Jesus as a shorter, dark-skinned, dark haired, and bearded man. With mental eyes we may see Jesus as part of the teaching ministry of his religion, as someone with a special aura about him, as someone who has an interest in the poor, etc. But I want you now to look at Jesus with spiritual eyes. (close your eyes if you wish.) See Jesus as someone who shares your baptismal life, as someone who connects deeply with God, whom he calls his Father. Look at Jesus as someone connected to you, as someone who shares the same human longings as you, and someone who shares the same human hopes as you. Look at Jesus with spiritual eyes and see him like yourself as someone with the dream of one day being with God, His Father, in the Kingdom. Holding on now to that vision of Jesus, the one you have of him with your spiritual eyes, listen to these words while he spoke these words centuries ago to the crowds gathering on that mount, hear them today as freshly spoken to the crowd gathered here in this Church

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.*

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every
kind of evil against you falsely because of me.*

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”