

4th Sunday OT A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Throughout our world, the Church, and our homes, a common question is being asked. People want to know if the waters of life are navigable and, if so, how. People are looking for a way to deal with the challenges, uncertainties, and difficulties of life. We want some assurance that the direction of our life will offer meaning and connect us to something larger than our individual stories. So how do we move forward? What are we to teach and tell our children and grandchildren? Those are the age-old questions, asked in every generation.

I recently saw those questions in the tears of a man who, for the first time, accepted financial help as he tries to chart a way through unemployment.

Often, our attempts to navigate life do not make the news. Regardless of whether they are personal struggles or family matters, they are just as real and of no less concern to God. Each of us could tell stories about the questions we face, the challenges we confront, and the difficulties we must overcome. Sometimes we seem to succeed, and other times we don't. Most of us have been taught to navigate the waters of life through power, strength, accomplishment, and acquisition. We work to be rich so we can have what we want. We seek power so we can take what we want. We argue to be right so we can have our way. We compete to win so we will be respected and admired. We want to be beautiful so we will be liked and

desired. Does any of that sound familiar? Did you ever try those ways of getting through life?

Those attitudes fill headline news, magazine articles, tabloid pictures, television, and our own lives. They find their origin in the idea that we are to be self-made men and women, that we are to build up ourselves and make a life. After all, we must look out for number one because if we don't, no one will. At least that's what many of us have been told. For too long, that has been the myth with which we have lived. Jesus' life and teaching fly in the face of that myth. Jesus offers a different way of navigating life.

The waters of life, he says, are navigable. But it's not through power, strength, accomplishment, or acquisition. The way forward is not the way we have always done it. It is not enough for us, as believers and followers of Jesus, to simply make over a little piece of our world or life. It is not enough to just reform a political or economic system. Navigating life is not about overcoming circumstances or other people. It is about overcoming ourselves.

If you want to know what overcoming yourself looks like, then look at the Beatitudes.

- **Blessed are the poor in spirit.**
- **Blessed are they who mourn.**
- **Blessed are the meek.**
- **Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness.**

- **Blessed are the merciful.**
- **Blessed are the clean of heart.**
- **Blessed are the peacemakers.**
- **Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.**
- **Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.**

That is how we navigate life. That is how to meet the challenges, uncertainties, and difficulties of life. That is what we are to teach our children and grandchildren. A lifetime of living the Beatitudes day after day, year after year, is how we overcome ourselves.

The Beatitudes are not simply Jesus' helpful hints for happy living. They are not the church's version of "**Hints from Heloise.**" They are descriptive of God's mind and Jesus' heart. They are kingdom values and reveal what kingdom life is like. They shape and form our lives and longings to be like God's life and longings. That's a pretty different approach. Most of the time, we twist and distort God's life and longings to fit ours. That's why the Beatitudes are so radical and often seem so out of reach.

As we hear Jesus' words and consider the Beatitudes, it's easy to look at ourselves and say, "**That is not me, that is not the world, that is not even the Church.**" You are right, it's not. We tend to look at what we are

not. God, however, focuses on what we can become, and whom we are called to be.

The temptation is to think that the beatitudes are rules or conditions for being blessed or receiving our heavenly reward. They are not that at all. They are not about building up, accomplishing, or acquiring. They are about letting go, surrendering, and living with a vulnerable and open heart. That doesn't mean we run away, back down, or isolate ourselves from the realities of our life and world. It means we engage them differently, in Jesus' way. The beatitudes teach us to trust God more than the external circumstances of our lives. They invite dependence on God rather than self-reliance.

In today's world, that sounds a lot like weakness and foolishness. That's what it sounds like at every age. But to those who are being saved, it is the power of God. God chose what is foolish to shame the wise and what is weak to shame the strong. The Beatitudes are nothing less than the way of the cross. The fullest expression of that kind of life is seen in Jesus' crucifixion. If we live the Beatitudes, they will take us to the cross. In the trauma and setbacks of life, we discover that we cannot live life on our own. As we admit our need for God, we find the purity of heart. The arrogance of self-sufficiency gives way to meekness. We realize that all that we are and have is from God, and we begin to know ourselves as poor in spirit. Our misfortunes awaken and connect us to the pain of the world, for which we cannot help but mourn. We think less about ourselves and

become merciful to others. We have nowhere else to go, and so we turn our gaze back to God. The longer we gaze at God, the more we hunger and thirst for righteousness, for God's life, and we become peacemakers reconciling ourselves to God and our neighbor. This is the life for which Christ's disciples are willing to be persecuted, a life of righteousness, the life for which Christ died and rose again.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Beatitudes are not so much about what we do, our actions, but how we do, our being. They are less about actions and more about relationships. To live the beatitudes is to live a life of reckless, exuberant, self-abandonment to God and our neighbor. That's called love. The only reason we can do that is that we know and trust ourselves to have already been blessed by God. We live the beatitudes as a response to God blessing us. That is the way of Christ. That is not only the way forward through this life, but it is also the way to live. If we are to follow Christ, it must become our way. **Amen.**