

4th Sunday Ordinary Time – A
January 29, 2017
Holy Spirit (HG)

Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13
I Cor 26-31
Matt 5:1-12a

I. As I've been mulling over the readings for these first weeks of the new liturgical year, it occurred to me there are several similarities between the beginnings of a new administration and the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

- at a certain point we elect a new president; two weeks ago, the first Sunday of Ordinary Time, we heard John the Baptist referencing Jesus' baptism when he witnessed the Spirit coming down upon Jesus at his baptism. Jesus' baptism was like his "election," the One chosen by the Father.
- the new president gives an inaugural speech in which the new president presents a concise statement of his vision. Last Sunday, we heard Jesus being his public ministry and present his essential vision, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- then the new president and administration get down to work and start to implement the details of their vision. *Today*, and for the new three Sundays, Jesus will present the details of his vision of what it means to be his disciple. The fifth chapter of Matthew lays out the details of Jesus' vision.

The beatitudes, which we just heard, reveals the fundamental attitude a disciple of Jesus must have.

II. To be Jesus' disciples, we need to get into this attitude.

We always do that whenever we decide to follow a leader.

That could apply to a new president, or a new governor or a new mayor: we need to consider, "where is this person coming from?" What are their ideas? What is their vision?

We would also do that when we have a new pope or a new pastor: we ask ourselves: where do they wish to lead us? What is their vision for Church and faith life?

Parents want their children to share their vision. Parents try to teach their children what they expect in terms of family life, how to treat others, how to get along in school and everyday life. Parents expect their children to work in unison with them.

So, Jesus is asking the same of us: he's asking us to get inside his head, to see the world and life the way he sees it. The beatitudes paint a vision of this mindset.

III. Jesus' vision about how to live and how to be is certainly not mainstream. His way of thinking is not how we would commonly approach life.

Recently I heard a teacher talk about how much her students are into materialism. They are all concerned about the brand of shoes they are wearing, that certain brands are better than others. Jesus rejects obsession with material things and will address spiritual poverty. Attachment to material things will hinder growing spiritually.

"Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted." Grief is always with us – whether that's the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, our health, a friend or our dreams. Grief is part of life. Many in society would want to ignore grief, or let it allow them to become angry and bitter. Instead, Jesus would say embrace it and turn it over to God where you will discover comfort and hope

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Many in our society would define meekness as being weak or even cowardly. But meekness is related to humility: a humble person is not a coward – they simply know who they are before God. Because they see themselves realistically, they are able to stand up to the challenges of life.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." Unfortunately, justice is not the most highly value in our society. Instead, many people will want to ride rough shod over others, thinking only of themselves and recognizing the rights of others. Jesus commends those who hang on to what is truly right and good – in this way, God's will and God's justice are done.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Peace is probably one of the things we want most in the world today. But genuine peace, is not merely the cessation of conflict. Achieving genuine peace is hard work; it requires a sustained effort over time. Genuine peace must touch the heart.

IV. Jesus' vision runs contrary to many ways in which we might think we would find happiness and fulfillment. His vision drives deeper and calls us to embrace the reality and messiness of life. It's not an escapist vision, but one which draws us into the fullness of human living.

In the depths of this vision, there is profound humility and even brokenness which allows for an openness for God.

Centuries before Jesus, the prophet Zephaniah spoke of a faithful remnant, “a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the Lord....they shall do no wrong and speak no lies; nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue.”

Some religious thinkers, over the years, have wondered whether or not Jesus really meant what he said in the beatitudes. Maybe they are some sort of flowery imagery. But many more have come to the conviction that Jesus truly did mean what he said.

This is Jesus’ program: those who can embrace it, those who can “get into it,” the mind and heart of Jesus will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Fr. Dwayne Thoman