

PATHS TO HAPPINESS: 4TH SUNDAY A

Not so long ago there was a popular song with the title: 'Don't Worry, Be Happy'. Some people liked it very much. I found it trite and superficial. In the first place, not worrying about anything is easier said than done. In the second place, being happy is not entirely up to us. Happiness is more a gift, a gift from God and other people than a personal achievement. This is clear from the happiness-bringing blessings listed by Jesus in the gospel today, his beatitudes.

The people to whom Jesus first spoke were, just like us, people longing for change. They were longing and hoping for a better society and a fairer deal, where the dignity of every other person is valued and respected, where everyone lives by the ideal 'all for one, and one for all', and where peace and joy triumph over indifference and hatred, gloom and bitterness. In the sincerity of his words and in the strength of his healings of all kinds of broken, distressed and struggling ones among them, they were sensing that their hopes and dreams for a better world were not misplaced. The eight beatitudes he spoke from the mountain with authority and passion, the same ones that he speaks to us today, assured them that he was indeed the 'Real Deal'.

All his beatitudes are promises. They stand in marked contrast to the cynical and mocking attitudes of some others who don't see any paths leading to that better world that Jesus started, God's world - a world of peace and happiness where God is king and reigns for ever. Not for them, then, any part of the 1963 dream of the Rev. Martin Luther King, a dream which extends the beatitudes of Jesus: 'I have a dream,' he announced, 'that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope.'

Jesus announces eight beatitudes, eight paths to happiness. With help here and there from insights of Fr. Flor McCarthy we will focus briefly on each one: -

1. Jesus says: 'How happy are the poor in spirit: theirs is the kingdom ...' Surely he meant to say, 'how happy are the rich'! Their money can bring them anything they want. Jesus sees the matter differently. Money and material possessions don't and cannot bring complete and lasting contentment. True riches are found in being the kind of persons we are meant to be, other-centred, not self-centred, and in our trust in God for what we need most of all, right relationships and a clear conscience.
2. Jesus says, 'happy the gentle', those who are approachable, gracious and kind, rather than those who are tough and ruthless, who bully and humiliate their victims. Gentleness is a form of strength rather than weakness.
3. Jesus says, 'happy those who mourn', who don't confuse real happiness with cheap and passing thrills, but who realize that what is most worthwhile in life comes at the cost of pain and sacrifice. Their hurts will be mixed with joy and deep-down peace.
4. Jesus says, 'happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right', not those who hunger and thirst for power, status, and fame. Being genuine and authentic, being someone of real

integrity, and consistently doing the right thing, all bring their own reward.

5. Jesus says, 'happy the merciful', who make allowances for the mistakes of others, not those who are blunt, bitter, harsh and unforgiving. For their own failings, shortcomings and mistakes, the merciful will find themselves wrapped in the tender mercy of God.
6. Jesus say, 'happy the pure in heart', whose thoughts, words and deeds all flow from a clean and undivided heart, and for whom being an all-round good person means much more than being a kind of show pony, looking good.
7. Jesus says, 'happy the peacemakers', not those looking for a fight, stirring up trouble, and intimidating others. God's true children are those who forgive, welcome strangers, comfort and console, those who work to defend persons abused, and who get people talking and listening to one another in mutual interest, understanding, respect, acceptance and friendship.
8. Jesus says, 'happy those who are persecuted', those who take a stand for what is right, and for their trouble are harassed and humiliated. They will be recognised on earth as his true followers, and will experience glory in heaven with Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One.

We conclude that the values the beatitudes stand for, such as peace, generosity, joy, love, gentleness, compassion, mercy and integrity, are beautiful and precious. Anyone living them in imitation of Jesus is already enjoying his presence and company, and working with him for that better world still to come. There and then, for the faithful followers of Jesus, for those who live the Beatitudes he taught, God will be everything in everyone.

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