

Other than their humanity what do Donald Trump, all the other world leaders from Japan, Russia, England, France, Mexico, and Australia that he recently spoke with share in common? For that matter what do they all share in common, say, with Hilary and Bill Clinton? Taking all of them into account, what do they also share with the entire United States Congress, both Republican and Democratic members, as well as all the Syrian refugees, from the youngest to the oldest, in camps in Turkey and Lebanon and Greece? I would even contend that all the aforementioned share the same thing in common with the suicide bomber belonging to al queda and the fighters for Isis. Ultimately, what do all those people also have in common with you and me?

For your consideration this evening, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I would like to suggest that all of us, from the highest to the lowest, the most and least powerful among us, the richest and the poorest, the youngest and the oldest, the best among us and the most evil of us, we all want to be happy.

It is this basic human desire that the Lord addresses in this sermon on the mount, not addressed to the crowds, but only to his disciples. What is given here as “blessed” is also translated as “happy”. In the circumstances he describes and the attitudes he puts forth, Jesus is saying happiness may be found, even as they sound irreconcilable. That’s why I often refer to the Beatitudes as “Attitudes for being”; but being what—being fully alive; being truly happy; being completely Christ-like.

I have a sketch hanging in the Rectory entitled “Laughing Jesus”. It portrays Christ with his head thrown back, his mouth wide open, and laughter in his eyes. That’s how I see Jesus—as fully alive and truly happy.

Now the happiness that I speak of is somewhat different than the way the world defines happiness. Extensive research was conducted on the 21st Century standards for measuring a man’s contentment with himself. The criteria were quite interesting. Let’s see how the men among us might measure up:

- 1. His ability to make and conserve money. (That leaves me out already)**
- 2. The cost, style, and age of his car. (Think about it. Is modern man more concerned about all that in his car rather than in his wife?)**
- 3. (This is my favorite) How much hair he has.**
- 4. His strength and his size.**
- 5. The job he holds and how successful he is at it.**
- 6. What sports he likes.**

7. **How many clubs he belongs to.**
8. **His aggressiveness and reliability.**

The standards that Jesus recommends in this sermon on the mount stand in stark contrast to those that the world sees as important to happiness.

There was another piece of research that was recently conducted that we should consider as we reflect on this universal human desire for happiness even among the youngest of us.

A researcher left a succession of 4-year olds alone in a room, seated at a table. He placed a single marshmallow in front of each and told the children that they could eat the marshmallow when he left the room, or they could wait until he returned. If they waited, they would receive a second marshmallow.

The children had a choice: one marshmallow now or two marshmallows if they were patient. The researcher then left the room to watch and record the responses of the children through a hidden camera. You can probably guess the results. Most of the children snarfed down the marshmallows as soon as the door shut. Some squirmed and fidgeted for a while, but, in the end, couldn't hold out long. They gave in and ate the marshmallow within two minutes. A few of the children—in a show of steely determination and self-discipline—picked the marshmallow up, licked it, and nibbled just a bit to get the taste, but didn't eat the whole thing. Only 2 of the 25 children endured the agony, waiting for the researcher to return, so that they could savor the second marshmallow.

What's true of children is true for all of us. We don't like to wait for something good. Even if we know we will get something better in the long run, we don't like waiting. We don't even like to wait for our blessings from God. We want them now!

I believe it was this human trait, the difficulty to wait even for blessings from God that caused Jesus to share this teaching only with his disciples, not the crowd. He knew that he would have to show the truth of this teaching to those who would follow him. For those who simply listened to his teaching and intended to move on in their lives, these beatitudes would sound ludicrous, like mere pie in the sky.

It would take Jesus suffering unjust torture and unbearable crucifixion, with unspeakable anguish, to show that some blessings, some happiness, often requires waiting patiently, trusting God to be faithful, that the deepest desires of our hearts may be realized.

While there is a futuristic aspect to all of these beatitudes, the blessing or happiness can only be attained by changing one's attitude. For instance, where Matthew says "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Luke says, "Blessed are you who are poor." People of means hear Matthew and say Jesus is not talking about money. He's talking about spiritual poverty. And poor people can say he surely is talking about financial poverty. So, the rich thank

God for Matthew and the poor for Luke. So, who is being blessed here—the rich person or the poor one. Chances are neither one.

You see, it is exactly this attitude of self-praise and self-justification that robs a person of the need for the Kingdom of God. When one says, “I don’t need to be poor in things because I am poor in spirit;” and the other says, “I don’t need to be poor in spirit because I am poor in things;” both are saying, “I don’t need”. Don’t need what? They don’t need God in their lives because they simply accept their realities just as they are. True happiness comes in trusting God in all the circumstances of our lives and relying on him to meet our every need, believing that he wants more for us and more from us than we want for ourselves.

Similarly, when we mourn if we just wallow in self-pity, we are swallowed up by our grief. Our comfort comes when we realize that we mourn because we have loved or been loved greatly. It is the attitude that we bring to our mourning that makes all the difference whether or not we can attain happiness even as we mourn. Are we mourning for ourselves or are we mourning for the other, whom we love and who has loved us? The memory of that love leads us to become even more loving, more compassionate, more caring, and that brings us even greater happiness.

We can even mourn the state of the world that seems to be self-destructing. If our attitude is only to say how terrible things are, we just get more and more miserable, and we become upset and fearful. But if our mourning over the state of the world motivates us to do something about it, we are comforted when we move into action.

In the end, it all takes me back to my beginning, in the first grade classroom of Sister Elizabeth Marie who taught me why God made me. “He made me to know him, to love him, and to serve him, and to be happy with him in this life and the next.”

In these attitudes of being fully alive, truly happy, really Christ-like that the Gospel offers us today that we call Beatitudes, we are given the prescription for being fully alive and truly happy both now and forever. Amen.