



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: Lesson 6

THE BEATITUDES concluded and TEACHING ON THE APPLICATION OF THE NEW COVENANT LAW

Merciful Father,

You sent Your beloved Son to suffer and to die for the salvation of mankind. You did not send Him to do away with suffering in the world but to unite His suffering to ours so that “through His stripes we might be healed.” It is when we unite our suffering to His that our suffering is transformed and becomes redemptive suffering unto salvation. You did not promise us that the road to eternal life would be easy, Lord, but You have promised that we would never make the journey alone so long as we unite our lives to the life of Your Son. Send us, our Father, Your Holy Spirit to guide us in our study; we pray in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“To you who hear me, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you and pray for those who maltreat you.” Luke 6:27

“Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” Luke 9:23

In His great homily which we call the “Sermon on the Mount” Jesus calls His 1st century disciples and all Christians of every generation to live the transformed life of the New Covenant Law empowered by the supernatural grace of God the Holy Spirit filling and indwelling each believer in the New Covenant Church. To begin our transformation we reject a proud and independent spirit and admit “poverty of spirit”, yielding to the sovereignty of God and admitting that we need to depend on God in our lives. Yielding to God in “poverty of spirit” defines our relationship with God and places us before His throne. Through our rebirth in baptism by water and the spirit He promises us an eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. Coming face to face with a pure and holy God we become aware of our sins. Our natural reaction is to mourn our sins and the sins of the world with His promise to comfort us when we respond in sincere contrition, to give us the strength to resist personal sin, and the strength to stand against sin in the world. The result is we are purified and renewed as we yield our selfish wills to the will of God working in our lives. When in meekness and humility we yield our will to Him, He gives us dominion over the earth—a earth that no longer has power over us, and we become heirs to the earthly Kingdom, the Universal Church which has the power and dominion to bind and loose the power of sin on the earth. Now we turn from what we need to give to God to what God is going to give to us. Our submission to His will brings about in us a hunger and thirst for righteousness; a hunger and thirst which can only be satisfied by the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus our Savior. We eat



Him but He consumes us and places in us a pure heart—His heart which cleanses us and makes us instruments of peace. As children of God we become new creatures in His image and we see the face of God in the faces of every soul we meet as we are called through the supernatural gift of God the Holy Spirit to allow our souls to be a conduit of His love flowing out to a world so desperately in need of His love.

Matthew 5:10-12: "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. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

If the Beatitudes are the conditions for Christian character that Jesus establishes for gaining entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven, then verses 11 and 12 are the invitation to put these spiritual precepts of the New Covenant Law into practice.

Question: How would you characterize Jesus' job description for a disciple?

Answer: Short term trials followed by long very long term rewards. Jesus is warning His disciples that they are taking their place as the successors to the holy prophets of old and that many will suffer the same fate as the Old Testament prophets—persecution, suffering and possibly death. The man or woman who stands for God stands against the world and the world can be very unforgiving.

What does the Old Testament teach about the persecution of the righteous? Please read Wisdom 2:12-24. This passage records the accusations of the wicked against the believer who is faithful to God. Hint: read this passage carefully; there is more to this passage that you may realize in a first reading.

Question: How does the righteous person affront the wicked? How is it that the ways of the righteous are obnoxious to the wicked? See verses 12-16

Answer: The actions of the righteous Covenant believer:

- He reproaches the wicked for sins against the Law [verse 12]
- He professes to have knowledge of God [verse 13a]
- He calls himself a child of God [verse 13b]
- The very righteous behavior of his life is an affront to the wicked because his righteous behavior condemns their wicked acts [verses 14-15]
- The righteous individual avoids the sinner and sin [verse 16a-b]
- The righteous individual has confidence that the righteous will be blessed by God [verse 16c]
- The righteous covenant believer calls God his Father [verse 16d]



This last identifying mark of a righteous believer, that he “calls God his Father” is a very curious addition. There are very few Old Testament passages in which a covenant believer addresses God as Father. One exception is 1 Chronicles 29:10 in King David’s prayer to God when he announced to the assembly of Israel the plans for his son Solomon to build the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem: *“Blessed may you be ,O LORD [Yahweh], God of Israel our father from eternity to eternity”* [also see Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:19]. It will be the New Covenant believers to whom Jesus will give this privilege of addressing God intimately as “our Father” through our relationship to God the Son [Romans 8:14-17]. In the Gospels Jesus refers to God as “Father” at least 167 times, a scandal to the religious authorities who use this charge of “arrogance” as one of the reasons for condemning Jesus: *“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is at work until now, so I am at work.’ For this reason the Jews tried all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God.”* Perhaps this curious addition in Wisdom 12: 16 that *“he calls blest the destiny of the just and boasts that God is his Father”* is a key to understanding these verses in the wider context of Salvation History.

Question: In Wisdom 2: 17-20 what persecutions do the wicked plan to test the righteous man? *“Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him.”*

Answer:

- They will test the righteous man to see if God will defend him [verse 18]
- They will taunt and torture the righteous man [verse 19]
- They will condemn him to a shameful death [verse 20]

Question: Wisdom 2:21-24 records that the wicked erred in their judgment to condemn the righteous man. Why?

Answer:

- They did not know the plans of God [verse 22a]
- Nor did they understand the power and reward of holiness [verse 22b]
- Nor did they discern the innocent souls’ reward [verse 22c]

Question: Is this account of the desire of the wicked to destroy the righteous man a reference to all righteous men/women or is this also a foreshadowing of the persecution and suffering of one righteous man in particular?

Answer: It probably applied to all martyrs but also in particular this passage is a foreshadow of the Passion of Christ.

Assignment: Please read Matthew 27:39-43 and then list the comparisons between the “righteous man” of Wisdom 2:12-24 and Jesus of Nazareth as described in the four



Gospels.

Answer: *“Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!’ Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* Matthew 27:39-43

The Righteous man of Wisdom 2:12-24	The Righteous man Jesus of Nazareth
Wisdom 2:16d <i>“and boasts that God is his father</i>	Jesus called God “Father, an intimate association that was denied to Old Covenant people through the lost of divine sonship in the Fall from grace [many times including Luke 15:34; John 20:17].
Wisdom 2:16c <i>“He calls blest the destiny of the just”</i>	Jesus called the righteous “blessed” in the Beatitudes and other teachings [Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 6: 20-21; etc.]
Wisdom 2:17-18 <i>“Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, he will defend him.”</i>	God called Jesus His Son [Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11, Luke 9:35; etc.]; Jesus called Himself God’s Son [Matthew 27:43; Luke 10:22; John 10:36; 11:4; 17:1; etc] and so did the demon spirits [Matthew 8:29]. Jesus was accused by the religious authorities through false witnesses at His trial [Matthew 26:59; Mark 14:56;].
Wisdom 2:19 <i>“With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of</i>	Jesus was beaten and tortured [Matthew 26:67-68; 27:26; Mark 14:65; 15:15-20;; Luke 22:63-



<i>his gentleness and try his patience.”</i>	65].
Wisdom 2:20 <i>“Let us condemn him to a shameful death..”</i>	Jesus was condemned to death [Matthew 27:66; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:20-25].
Wisdom 2:19 <i>“With revilement...let us put him to the test...”</i>	The crowd taunted to see if God would save Him [Matthew 27:39-40; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:35]
Wisdom 2:20-22 <i>“Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him. [...] nor discern the innocent soul’ reward.”</i>	Jesus, the innocent, suffered on the Cross, a shameful death, at the hands of the unrighteous for the sake of both the righteous and the unrighteous and His reward was the Resurrection! [Matthew 27:35-50; Mark 15:29-39; Luke 23:33-34; etc.]
Wisdom 2:23 <i>“For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him.”</i>	Jesus was begotten in the image of God and suffered, died and was buried to be resurrected to new life in order to restore us to the image of the Father in Christ [John 1:14; 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9; Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:16:6; Luke 24:5-8] .

Question: Why do the unrighteous hate the righteous? See Wisdom 2:23-24.

Answer: It is from envy or jealousy; a trait the unrighteous “inherit” from the devil opposed to the image of righteousness that the righteous inherit from God.

Question: What does the Roman governor Pilate decide is the reason that Jesus has been handed over to the Roman authorities by and His death demanded? See Matthew 27:15-18

Answer: *“For he [Pilate] knew that it was out of envy that they had handed him [Jesus] over.”* Envy was also the reason for the first murder of a righteous man; envy is the reason Cain killed Abel [see Genesis 4:3-11].



Question: Despite the persecution the righteous may suffer, what does God promise in Wisdom 3:1-9?

Answer:

- Since their souls are in God's hands they will not face eternal torment only temporal torment [verses 1-4]
- Their suffering will be judged an acceptable and holy sacrifice [verses 5-6]
- God promises the righteous grace, mercy and justice [verses 7-9]

The rewards of living the Beatitudes are eternal but to reach that eternal reward may involve suffering. We must be ready and willing to endure suffering for the sake of our salvation. If God did not spare His Son or His Son's Mother suffering, why should He spare us? According to St. Anthony "*No one can enter the kingdom of heaven without being tested; it says, take away temptation and no one will be saved.*" [St. Anthony quoted in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, as quoted from *The Beatitudes: Soundings in Christian Tradition*, page 104].

St. Juliana of Norwich was an English nun who lived the Beatitudes through a relationship of deep, holy intimacy with her Savior. On May 8th, 1373 when she was 30 years old she received 16 visions which she related in a book entitled *Revelations of Divine Love*. In this work, sometimes entitled simply, *Showings*, she writes "*The Trinity is our everlasting lover, our joy and our bliss, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" She also speaks of Jesus as "*our clothing*" in which "*In His love He wraps and holds us. He enfolds us for love, and He will never let us go*", and in meditating on the passion of Christ she earnestly writes, "*It is my desire to suffer with Him.*" In her visions she received a unique perspective through which she entered into the suffering of Jesus. She writes "*the body plenteously bleeding....the fair skin....broken full deep into the tender flesh with sharp smiting all about the sweet body. So plenteously the hot blood ran out that there was neither seen skin nor wound, but as it were all blood.*" But Juliana's visions and revelations were not without cost. Although Juliana's visions brought her deep personal intimacy with her Savior the revelation of those visions also brought her persecution from those who could not understand or comprehend this gift of intimacy.

Question: Do the details of St. Juliana's perspective of this vision of the Passion of Christ sound familiar? Who is the son of the Church who displayed his vivid images of Christ's Passion through the medium of film and faced persecution from within and without the Church?

Answer: It is the same perspective Mel Gibson provided in his film, *The Passion of the Christ*. Mel Gibson, like St. Juliana, has suffered persecution in sharing his intimate cinematic vision of Christ's Passion.



Francis of Assisi, the poor little 13th century monk who founded the Franciscan Order, on the other hand provides the spiritual revelation of a radiant life filled with a reflection of love expressed as buoyant joy as he gave up all worldly goods and concerns to follow his Savior! The only son of a very wealthy man, Francis was able, through love of Christ, to give up what the Rich Young Ruler was unable to give up—he gave up his entire self to Christ and in his discovery of the joy that comes from that abandonment to complete obedience he longed to share this joy with the world. Paul Sabatier in his biography of this great Saint wrote of St. Francis' zeal in living the blessings and promises of the Beatitudes as a missionary for Christ, *“Perfectly happy, he felt himself more and more impelled to bring others to share his happiness and to proclaim in the four corners of the world how he had attained it.”* St. Francis called his little band of fellow monks “God’s jugglers” and sent them out, all over Europe, with the task to *“revive the hearts of men and lead them into spiritual joy.”* These Friars Minor not only preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but they sang the Gospel with joyous adoration of the Savior—it was a joyous trust which characterized their witness of the Gospel founded in lives emptied of self and lives lived through the promises of Christ.

There are many examples of this joyous trust but one story includes the great saint, St. Dominic who, along with other rather critical Church leaders, had come to observe the gathering of some 5,000 poor Franciscans in an open field. St. Francis opened the ceremonies with a stirring homily which concluded with the command that in obedience to Jesus teaching in The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:25-34 that they should not worry but trust in God: *“So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ Or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”* St. Dominic and the other Church leaders were distressed by the seemingly rash command issued by Francis to these poor friars who had neither food nor shelter, nor any form of material aid. But Dominic’s distress was soon changed to amazement when within a short period of time the people from the local towns and villages began arriving with generous supplies of food and drink for the assembled monks. A great joyous feast was the result of this abundant generosity of the townspeople. Dominic was changed by this sign of God’s providence. Humbled by the experience, the great Dominic meekly knelt before the poor, ragged little Francis and asking his forgiveness acknowledged *“God is truly taking care of these holy little poor men, and I did not realize it. Therefore I promise henceforth to observe the holy poverty of the Gospel.”*

But this Franciscan way of “living joy” was not without cost. It was joy that would be shaped and tempered by deep suffering and sorrow but made bearable by Christ’s promise that the Kingdom of heaven would be theirs as they embraced the joy of the cross each bore for the sake of Jesus. But the Franciscans and others like them have discovered that deep resonant joy shaped by suffering for Christ is the hallmark of holy obedience and that it is what is necessary to achieve true spirituality—not the superficial



“spirituality” that comes from a “feel good” sermon or lecture, but the deep spirituality that comes from one’s soul as it is transformed and united into the life of the Most Holy Trinity so that the works of God flow through the joyously transformed life of the believer. Holiness is not marked by inaction but by the actions of God transmitted through a receptive soul to impact upon other lives. We live the Beatitudes and the other teachings of the Sermon on the Mount into order to be transmitters of holiness who radiate God’s love to the lost sheep of this world, by lives lived supernaturally through the human spirit empowered by God the Holy Spirit, and as St. Francis instructed his little monks, faithfully teaching the Gospel to everyone we meet, and only speaking when necessary!

We expect persecution from outside the Church but the most painful persecution is that which comes from within our own Church family. However, in those times we must ask ourselves, if we had lived at the time of Jesus of Nazareth and if we had known that Judas Iscariot was a liar and a thief even though he was part of Jesus’ inner circle, would we have left Jesus? I think our answer would have been the same answer Peter gave Jesus in John 6:67-69.

Question: What was Peter’s response to Jesus in this passage?

Answer: *“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”* And we might add, and the Church You founded is the true Church and through it because we eat Your Body in the Eucharist we are indeed Your Body in the Church and You have promised us that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it!

“...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Question: Is this promise repeated from another blessing?

Answer: Yes, it is an exact repeat of the first beatitude. Scholars who count the Beatitudes as a list of 7 point out that this blessing and promise is a summation of the 7 Beatitudes. This is again the assurance of the promise of eternal life when, “by His death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has ‘opened’ heaven to us.” CCC# 1025 [Also see Matthew 3:16 and CCC #536: “.... At his baptism ‘the heavens were opened’—the heavens that Adam’s sin had closed—and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation.”]

Now Jesus repeats the beatitude and changes from the third person address to the second person, *“Blessed are you...”*

BLESSED ARE YOU



“And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna [hell].” Matthew 10:28

“There is no Christianity without the Cross!”

Matthew 5:11-12: *“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. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

In directing this blessing personally (“you”) to the disciples and the Apostles, Jesus is acknowledging them as successors to the holy prophets of Yahweh who in their obedience to the will of God perished for their faithfulness. This is a fate that will befall all of the Apostles with the exception of John Zebedee who will suffer imprisonment and other forms of persecution for his commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not make the job description for “Emissaries [*Apostolos*] of God” particular appealing in this life but there can be no doubt the promise of the long term benefits are eternally great.

Question: St John Chrysostom points out in his homily on the Beatitudes that to receive this blessing, to be insulted or libeled by someone is not enough to qualify as religious persecution. The blessing in Matthew 5:11 has two limitations place on it. What are the limitations?

Answer:

1. When the insult is said because of one’s belief in Jesus
2. When the things for which a believer is accused of saying concerning Christ are false.

Question: In Matthew chapter 23:1-39 Jesus denounces the unrighteous scribes and Pharisees. He pronounces against them seven curses in verses 13-39. Beginning in 23:29 what did Jesus prophesy about the persecutors of the righteous?

Answer: He will send them prophets and wise men and teachers of the New Covenant Law [scribes] who they will persecute and even kill just as their ancestors persecuted and killed Yahweh’s prophets. In verse 39 Jesus pronounces that all the unrighteous deeds of previous generations will fall upon the 1st century AD generation to whom He has witnessed the Gospel of salvation.

Question: What does Jesus prophesy about the persecuted righteous in Matthew 24:1-31? What is the key verse in this passage that contains the promise of a future salvation for the righteous?

Answer: Jesus warns the disciples that those who “believe in His name”, meaning believer all that He has taught, will be persecuted and possibly killed but they will



receive justice in the final judgment when Jesus comes again. The key verse is 24:13 *“But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.”*

Question: In Mark 10:38 Jesus asks the brothers James and John Zebedee *“can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* What is this cup to which Jesus refers?

Answer: To “drink of the cup” in the metaphorical language of the Old Testament is to accept the destiny assigned by God, usually a destiny of suffering or even death.

Question: When did Jesus ask His disciples and all Christians to accept suffering for His sake? Can you think of a specific verse? Hint: see Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; and 14:27.

Answer: We are commanded to “take up the cross and follow Him.” Mark 8:34-35: *“He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, ‘Whoever wished to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it.’”*

Jesus’ message is clear, to follow Christ and to do what he commands means risking everything in this present life to gain a future eternal life. Those who refuse to “take up their cross” to follow Christ and who act for their own satisfaction and temporal gain, endanger their eternal salvation. It is only when a person dies to self and lives for Christ that he or she unselfishly gives his or her life to God and to others whether in marriage, or in parenting, or in acts of love and charity to others. The Christian life is based on self-denial: **“There is no Christianity without the Cross!”** [see CCC# 459].

Question: In Matthew 5: 12 Jesus’ urges that those persecuted should “rejoice and be glad”, why?

Answer: The joy is to come not in spite of the persecution but because of it. Even though the promised Kingdom has not yet come the faithful one who is persecuted can rejoice because the future blessing of the kingdom, also promised to the prophets of old, makes the suffering bearable. St James, first Christian Bishop of Jerusalem in his letter to the universal Church reminds them of this promised blessing in James 5:10-11 when he wrote, *“Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of the perseverance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, because ‘the Lord is compassionate and merciful.’*

The result of being a conduit of His love is that those in the world who resist His love will take their rage and hurt out on us and the only retaliation we are allowed is to mourn the sins of the world, to “turn the other cheek” and to offer the world our Christian love for His sake as a beacon of truth. We will face persecution of the sake of our Savior but



when we do He promises us that our reward will greatly outweigh our sufferings and we will claim our reward in the loving arms of our eternal Father in the Kingdom of Heaven. When facing persecution we should remember His promises and repeat this verse of encouragement: *“Yahweh is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear? Yahweh is the fortress of my life, whom should I dread?”* Psalm 27:1 [see CCC#459; 520; 2608].

CONCLUSION on the BEATITUDES TEACHING

Beatitudes contain 7 or 8 [depending on how you count them] successive fundamental spiritual states that every Christian must strive to achieve. The Beatitudes must be lived fully and completely just as the 10 Commandments have to be lived in their entirety, just as all 7 of the gifts of the Holy Spirit must be claimed to be opened in our souls [Isaiah 11:1-2; CCC # 1831], and just as all 12 “fruits” of the Holy Spirit must ripen within us in order for us to bear the “good fruit” of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23; CCC# 1832]. But the Beatitudes as the New Law of God the Holy Spirit represents both a present and a future fulfillment. Just as Jesus was a present reality in His Resurrection as the “firstfruit” of the Resurrection that is promised to all of us [Colossians 1:15] as a future reality, so Jesus wants us to be strengthened and encouraged by the “firstfruits” of these spiritual gifts, but the great harvest He will reap is yet to come when Christ returns to gather His elect [1 Thessalonians 4:16]. The 1st beatitude we must achieve on this spiritual journey to heaven, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* both sets the spiritual tone of His homily and suggests the present reality.

Question: The verb in the promise of the first beatitude is expressed in what tense?

Answer: In the **present tense**: *“theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Question: The final blessing promise, which address persecution, is expressed in what verb tense?

Answer: *“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* is also expressed in the **present tense**.

Question: The other blessings all contain a verb in what tense?

Answer: In the **simple future tense** *“they will or shall be..”* **The beatitudes promise a present and a future fulfillment.** It is through the universal Catholic Church and especially the sacraments, the visible signs of God’s grace given to the Church through the works of Jesus the Messiah, that our Lord and Savior blesses and encourages us in this life as we look forward to the next:

1. It is **now** through the Sacrament of Baptism that we are reborn into the family of God and **now** receive the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven that is the first promise.



2. It is **now** through the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we are comforted now in mourning for our sins
3. It is **now** through yielding our lives to God in meekness and humility that we obediently follow the teachings of Mother Church, and through the Sacrament of Confirmation that we are strengthened in our struggle and place ourselves in the hands of God as Apostles for Christ and today live lives useful to ourselves, useful to our families, useful to our local communities and to the spread of the Gospel in the world when we allow the works of God to work through us.
4. It is **now** through the Sacrament of the Eucharist that Christ the Righteous One gives all of Himself to us filling us with His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.
5. It is **now** that through the corporal works of mercy that we are called to show the same kind of mercy and forgiveness that God has given us to everyone we meet.
6. It is **now** through our self-sacrifice which yields a cleansing of our hearts that we can love with the same kind of love with which Jesus loves us and through acts of mercy we have Jesus' promise that we will see His face in every person who is hurt or suffering, and the healing of suffering is offered **now** to us through the Sacrament of Anointing.
7. It is **now** that we are called to let "the peace of God rule in our lives" [Colossians 3:15] and to let that peace diffuse through us into the world as ministers of peace called to a royal priesthood in Christ while others of us are called to the ministerial priesthood and holy orders.
8. And finally there is the beatitude promising persecution which may be a summation of the 7 beatitudes but is in any case clearly a present reality which promises the future reality in the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In this call to a transformed life Jesus asks us in this earthly exile to live the spiritual reality of the beatitudes daily, to walk in His footsteps spreading His love and giving His mercy, but we must also keep our eyes on heaven for that is our future and eternal reality!

This last promised blessing is also a bridge to the continued teaching on living this spiritual love. "*Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you*" is immediately followed by the salt and light metaphors illustrating the blessing of the spiritual fertility that comes from living the beatitudes and bearing the fruit of our faith which is the good deeds that glorify God.

TEACHING ON THE APPLICATION OF THE NEW COVENANT LAW THE SIMILES OF SALT AND LIGHT



“Characteristics of the People of God: [...]. Its mission [the Church] is to be salt of the earth and light of the world. This people is ‘a most sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race.’ CCC# 782

If you turn to Exodus 20:1-17 you will find the list of the 10 Commandments, but after the initial list of the articles of the Law there follows the regulations concerning the application of the Law. Chapters 21-23 continue with laws regulating the treatment of slaves, personal injury law, laws pertaining to property damage, trusts and loans, and social laws. After the ratification of the Sinai Covenant in chapter 24:1-11, Moses ascends the mountain in Exodus 24: 12. In God’s heavenly court Moses is given instruction in reproducing replicas of the heavenly furniture to be used in ritual worship, including the Ark of the Covenant; the sacrificial altar and the altar of incense, including the proper mix of the incense; the Laver used for the holy water; direction on which artisans to use in the construction of the Tabernacle; instructions in making the priestly vestments and in the consecration of the priesthood; the sacrifices to used in the ordination ceremony, and the only sacrifice mentioned for the people, the Tamid daily sacrifice of two lambs in Exodus 29:38-42. Then after the sin of the Golden Calf in chapter 32 the Law is expanded to include 6 additional sacrificial classifications; the annual Holy Days of Obligation are expanded to 7, and ritual purity is expanded—in fact the law continues to expand as the Israelites continue to be obstinate and disobedient—little children need more rules; until the second Law, or continuation of the Law, is given in Deuteronomy, the last of the five books of Moses. In all by tradition the Jews count 613 articles of the Law from Exodus to Deuteronomy. It is a law encompassing creed, code, and cult that will touch on every aspect of life for the Covenant people. Just as the 10 Commandments were the outline of the body of the Law and the rest of the commands that followed concerned the application of the Law so too now does Jesus expand on the teaching of the Beatitudes, the New Covenant Law and how Christians are to live the New Law.

Please read Matthew 5:13-16: The Christian as the salt of the earth.

If the Beatitudes outline the steps to achieve spiritual Christian perfection then the salt and light metaphors begin the teaching on the application of that perfection.

Question: This passage focuses on two opposing forces, what are they?

Answer: The righteous believer/ the Church verses the unrighteous / the world.

This is a difficult assignment. Jesus commands that Christians live the Beatitudes for the good of a world that stands in opposition to Christian values and beliefs, but He approaches this teaching by using a very useful and practical metaphor. Every home in the first century, and every home today—rich and poor alike, has both salt to season food and give a more pleasing taste and light to illuminate the house at sundown.



Question: In addition to improving the flavor of foods what other purposes does salt have?

Answer: As a preservative, to improve health, as a purifier, to safeguard a slippery path.

1. **Preservative:** In ancient times as in modern times, salt, is used as a preservative. In the days before refrigeration salt was especially important— in fact salted fish was a staple of the Roman Empire. The Roman authorities hired fisherman on the Galilee to provide barrels of salted fish for the Roman armies stationed throughout the Mediterranean and Asia Minor, and for the citizens of the city of Rome. Galilean fisherman, historians believe, made quite a good living from these Roman contracts; what they sold beyond the contract limit was an added profit. Archaeologists have discovered a large 1st century fish processing facility at Tabgha on the Galilee. This fish salting plant was located next to the village of Capernaum and was probably the reason Peter, as a savvy businessman, relocated his fishing business from his hometown of Bethsaida to Capernaum.
2. **Health:** So much of our processed foods contain salt that we probably do not consider salt as necessary to good health, but the ancients certainly understood the benefits of adequate amounts of salt in a diet for the sake of one’s health.
3. **Purifier:** We also do not think of salt as a purifier but just drop a little salt on a wound and you will understand the “purifying” effects of salt. It is the salt in the oceans of the world that act as a natural cleaning agent, and most water purification systems use salt as a “purifier”.
4. **Non-slippery agent:** The ancients wouldn’t have wasted salt on a slippery path—as a commodity it was too valuable to them to be wasted that way unless the salt had lost its flavor and was no longer salty—something that could happen to Dead Sea salt that was full of impurities. It wouldn’t be the true salt that had lost flavor, sodium chloride is a very stable compound, but instead the impurities that were left in the container that had once held the salt crystals. The powdery impurities would only be good to “*be thrown out and trampled underfoot*” on some road or dirty footpath.

Question: Since Jesus is using salt as a metaphor for the Christian’s positive influence how do each of these uses of salt compare to the Christian’s/Church’s impact on the world and what does this suggest about the condition of the world in general and the unrighteous in particular? Use the examples of salt as a 1). preservative, 2). health aid, 3). purifier, and 4). non-slippery agent in your answer.

Answer: The Christian/the Church verses the world in the salt metaphor:

THE WORLD	THE CHRISTIAN/ CHURCH
1. The world is in a state of	1. Christian influence for



spiritual decay and has no “flavor” for holiness.	righteousness preserves and encourages what is holy and good, saving the world through the “salt” of faith and righteousness and providing a moral standard based on a “taste” for the righteous of Christ in the Eucharist.
2. The world promotes unhealthy behavior both physically and spiritually. Sin is harmful to living creatures.	2. In teaching the Law of God and the Gospel message of salvation the Christian promotes temporal health for the body and eternal health for the soul.
3. The world is a corrupting influence; the material and selfish values of the world are in complete opposition to the values of the Christian.	3. The Christian example is one of purification of body, mind and spirit in giving the self-sacrificial love of Jesus to each other and to the world in general.
4. The world is on the slippery slope to eternal damnation.	4. The Christian example provides stability through the God given institutions of marriage, family, and the Church. It is the Church as our mother who teaches us the way to salvation and eternal life. It is our obligation as Christians living the Beatitudes to share this teaching with the world.

Jesus will return to the salt imagery in Mark 9:50, and again in Luke 14:34. St. Paul will use the same imagery in Colossians 4:6 when he writes to the Christians of Colossus *“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how you should respond to each other.”*

Please read Matthew 5:14-16: The Christian as the light of the world.

Question: In John 8:12; 9:5 and 12:35, & 46 Jesus identifies Himself as the *“light of the world”* but in Matthew 5:14 He identifies the Christian as the *“light of the world.”* Is this a contradiction in Scripture? See John 12:36



Answer: Certainly not! The Christian does not generate his own “light” but it is Christ Himself who generates this supernatural internal light of the Christian soul. We reflect the burning love of Christ within us. In John 12:36 Jesus tells the disciples “...*believe in the light so that you may become children of the light.*” John is writing of Christ as “the light” and it is Christ who empowers us to be “children of the light”.

Question: What is the implied contrast between the Christian/the Church and the world?

Answer: The world is in darkness and the Church, through the Body of believers, provides the light of salvation.

Question: What are the examples given to express this metaphor of Christian light in positive and negative images?

Answer:

- Positive: A Christian or a congregation should be like city clearly visible on a mountain top, or like a lamp set on a stand that gives light to the whole house just as a the righteous life of a Christian witness is visible to all who know or observe that Christian.
- Negative: A light put under a basket is a Christian or a faith community who suppresses the light and does not exhibit his or her Christian beliefs by outward signs. This person or community is not sharing the light of Christ.

The Christian and the Church verses the world in the light metaphor:

THE WORLD	THE CHRISTIAN / CHURCH
The world is in darkness	It is the Christian’s duty to let the light that is Christ and the Gospel message of salvation shine through the Christian soul to illuminate the earth as a beacon of truth.

Question: How does Jesus define Christian light? See Matthew 5:16.

Answer: The good deeds of Christians which are the works of God working through His children.

Question: In St. John’s vision of the universal Church as Bride of Christ how does he describe the appearance of the Bride in Revelation 19:7-8?

Answer: The textile of her wedding garment was woven of the righteous deeds of



Christians! *“Alleluia! The reign of the Lord our God Almighty has begun; let us be glad and joyful and give glory to God, because this is the time for the marriage of the Lamb. His Bride is ready, and she has been able to dress herself in dazzling white linen, because her linen is made of the good deeds of the saints.”* [New Jerusalem translation]

Question: How does a Christian give a public witness of belief?

Answer: Some of the simplest ways to give a Christian witness is by wearing a crucifix, carrying a rosary, going to Mass, performing acts of charity, praying in public before meals, etc. Other witnesses come from attending pro-life rallies and actively campaigning against abortion or contacting representatives in congress to support marriage as defined by the Church, etc.

Question: But what is the condition placed on the Christian in order to be a source of salt and light? See Romans 12:2 to help you with your answer.

Answer: The Christian is indeed “in the world” but the Christian must not be “of the world.” The faithful believer must remain apart from the world and in no way conform to or become contaminated by the world or he/she will lose “flavor” and lose “light”. The Christian must remain distinctively Christian in all aspects of life. If Christians become indistinguishable from non-Christians then the Church has lost her distinctive call to lost souls to come out of the sinful influences of the world and into God’s Covenant family. The Church should be an instrument that promotes “social justice” but social justice is only an outgrowth of the works of faith to which the Church is called. The main focus of the message must always be salvation through Jesus Christ.

Question: When a Christian or a faith community becomes influenced by the world and the teachings of Christ become diluted, conforming to what the world supports in its changing values suited to the changing times [like abortion, birth control, same sex marriages, divorce, etc.], there is a price to be paid. If that community or that Christian has become something contrary to what the Church and Sacred Scripture teach, what is the value of their Christian witness? See Matthew 5:13.

Answer: In that case, a Christian goes from “righteous disciple” to useless “road dirt”, as Jesus says *“no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”* We must transform the world without the world leaving its mark on us. Preserving the uniquely Christian character of the Church as passed down to us by Jesus Christ is the call to Christian responsibility and obedience.

If the Christian is the salt that preserves, purifies and improves the world as well as the light that enlightens mankind then those who are attached to the world destroy rather than purify and they live in darkness unlike the Christian who provides the light of Christ that illuminates the world. Jesus tells us it is the New Covenant believer who will save the world through the salt of faith and who will provide the internal light that guides hearts and souls out of the darkness of sin and despair and into the light which is Christ.



In our Christian mission that is contrary to the teaching and wisdom of the world, we must be ever mindful of Jesus' warning to us as we struggle against worldly influence:

"If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you." John 15:18-19

Questions for group discussion:

Question: In Jesus' address of the Beatitudes and the continuation of the sermon to the disciples, do the disciples stand for all Christian believers or only for the Church hierarchy?

Answer: This is a question Bible scholars have addressed and taken a stand on both sides of the issue. This is my stand in this issue: In chapter 6 of Luke's Gospel [6:12-15] we are told that while on the mountain Jesus had chosen the 12 Apostles from this group of disciples. These Apostles will become the first bishops, the spiritual fathers of the universal Church. He does, I believe however, address in this discourse both the Apostles, as the leaders, and the disciples, filling the role of the faithful. The hierarchy of the Church, the shepherds of the Shepherd will be expected to pass this major teaching of the New Law on to the new generation of Covenant believers but as disciples of the Lord we also have the obligation to pass on what we have been taught. This discourse will become part of the body of the catechism of the universal Church to be taught, to be learned, and to be lived by all the faithful.

Question: What advice does Jesus give concerning persecution in Luke 12:2-12? What verse in your opinion expresses the key teaching in this discourse?

Question: What are some of the differences or similarities that you have noticed between the Old Covenant Law as presented in the 10 Commandments and the New Covenant Law as presented in the Beatitudes?

Answer: The 10 Commandments presents the moral law while the Beatitudes present the spiritual law. The 10 Commandments are negative commands, "*You shall not*", while the Beatitudes are positive statements, "*Blessed are the..*", however, a negative is implied if the blessing is not embraced. In both sets of the Law, the first three statements address our relationship to God, but in the Commandments the remaining commands which address our relationship to others while the remaining 4 Beatitudes move us spiritually into the life of Christ.



Question: Jesus' command to each faithful Christian is to take up our cross and follow Him just as he invited St. Peter in John chapter 21:18-19. What does this command mean to you personally?

Question: How are you living the present reality of the Beatitudes? Discuss them point by point. Have you suffered persecution and injustice in your walk with Christ? What is your advice to others who are suffering under this burden?

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