HOMILY
The Beatitudes -- Attitudes for a Happy Life

Father Larry Richards, Moderator

Bread of Life Community

Homily for Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

READINGS: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 5:1-12a

Today we have the Beatitudes. Before we jump into them, I want to give you the background for them. It's found in the second reading. A lot of times the second reading doesn't fit in, but it sure does today. Go to 1 Corinthians 1:23. "But we preach Christ, and Christ crucified." We go on to verse 27. "God chose those whom the world considered absurd to shame the wise. He singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's low born and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something." Isn't that nice? He's talking about us. It isn't a compliment, but it's a good one. In Chapter 2 verse 2: "I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified." Because of the sun here in church today you can't see the cross, but if you could see the crucifix, it's the Crucified One on it, and you need to keep that in the back of your mind now, as we talk about the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes are about being crucified. It's about being weak. It's about giving away our life. It's about being humble. If we keep this in our background, then that will help us understand the Beatitudes. Let's go to Matthew Chapter 5. We begin with verse 3. Now remember, these are the Beatitudes, or as some people like to say, the "Be Happy Attitudes." If you want to be happy, this is the attitude you have to have. Isn't it interesting that to be happy we have to be crucified. To be happy we need to be crucified. TO BE HAPPY WE NEED TO BE CRUCIFIED. That's just the way it is. "I have been crucified with Christ." (Galatians 2:19). I have been crucified, so now I'm alive because Christ lives inside of me. What Jesus is doing here, is Jesus is taking the world, and putting it on its edge. He says, "I know that the world says -- to be happy you have to
have lots of money, you have to have lots of power, you have to have lots of THINGS." (You DO realize, that people who have lots of money, lots of power and lots of things are usually not happy). There's more rich people that kill themselves than poor ones. The world offers us that lie. You can work with it, as long as it doesn't control you.

Now, let's look at Jesus. I want to go through each of the Beatitudes. What I want each of us to do is to take my life, and take your life, and lay it beside that Beatitude. Take your life, be honest with the Lord, and lay it next to that Beatitude. Say, "Do I have this attitude in my life?" Mmmm....Now again, these are not suggestions for life. He's telling us that this is how his followers should live. I'm not going to like to do this either. I'll tell you that right up front. I know. Let's go to the first one. "How Blessed are the poor in spirit." This gives the groundwork for all the beatitudes. It's a stance of humility. God is God and I am not. I can't even take my next breath without God. Everything I have is God's. Every gift I have been given is God's gift, and He lets me use it. I am poor in spirit. Do you think you're a self-made man or woman? You're going to Hell! God doesn't care about self made men and women. He cares about God-made men and women. Too often we think, "I'm self-made, I pick myself up by my bootstraps." Well, that's a sin. Get over it! That's pride. We get picked up by Christ. He gave you the power to pick yourself up! It's all about Jesus, it's not about me. That's being poor in spirit...that I am a person who is poor in spirit...that everything I have has been given to me by God and I know that because I am so grateful. I have a life of gratefulness because everything I have is God's and He just lets me use it. He's given me all my abilities. You see how important that stance is? It's very un-American, isn't it? We like self-made men. I've talked to you about this before...people love the song, "I Did It My Way." That's the theme song of people in Hell. They're all singing..."I did it my way..." Well, they're all in Hell. We are not in this life to do it "my way". We have life to do it God's way. That's what this beatitude is about - the poor in spirit. Everything comes from God. OK, put your life up against that beatitude. Yeh, I don't like it either! Number two. "Blessed are the sorrowing, for they shall be consoled." That's kind of a weird one isn't it? When we are sorrowing it can mean a couple of things. It means we have a heart that's filled with compassion. We are touched by things that happen in the world. When people sin, it touches us. When people are hurt, it touches us. We rejoice with those who rejoice, and we are sad with those who are sad. We let the world touch us. On the way down to Washington for the Pro Life March, I made the kids watch the movie "Song of Bernadette." They were sorrowing! But, Our Lady said to Bernadette at Lourdes, "I can never promise you happiness on earth." Jesus said the same thing. He said, "In the world you will have trouble. But, have confidence, because I have overcome the world." So, Jesus told us that we would be struggling in the world. Everyone of us here knows that. But, when we struggle, that shows how much we need God. I need to throw myself on Him. "Lord, you are the only thing I've got." When we lose people we love, that's a sorrowing time. But, it needs to be replaced by the hope that this person is alive forever, that we're going to be together forever. You know that last week we buried Sister Christine. I was kind of sad when Mother called me up and said, "You know you were very special to Sister Christine." I talked to her throughout my whole seminary. Every week I'd go next door and talk to Sister in Carmel. When she died and we buried her, she was smiling from ear to ear. Smiling from ear to ear she was in that casket. They don't embalm the Carmelites. That's
just the way she died. She had pain, but as soon as she died, that smile got on her face. I looked at Sister. Mother said, "Larry, please keep her busy in heaven." I said, "Don't you worry, Mother, I will. If she's going to pray for me..." At the funeral I asked Sister Christine this question. "If you're in heaven and you promise to pray for me, would you please give me a sign? Send me a rose this week. (Nothing big)! Just to show that you're going to be a saint in heaven praying for me because I'm a sinful priest." On Thursday I got in the mail from someone in Cleveland a bouquet of roses from the Carmelites for prayers that are going to be said for me. So, Christine who is alive and saw how we were all sorrowing, sent me roses this week from the Carmel in Cleveland, promising to pray for me. Now, that is real! Though we were sorrowing, I knew how much I needed God, and He came through immediately, and now Sr. Christine is in heaven, and she'll be busy for the rest of her eternity, praying for me! She needs to. Lots of good things will be happening. So, if we are sorrowing, we need to have hope that God will turn our sorrow into joy, and He'll give us peace.

"Blessed are the lowly, for they shall inherit the land." Again, instead of meek, it's lowly. This isn't my beatitude. You know. Maybe it's yours. Inheriting the land means that you will get what God has to give to you. You are trusting in God for all that you need. This past week, someone came up to me and gave me a thousand dollars. When they gave it, I said thank you and gave it right back. I said, "I don't need it." They were very upset. I said, "Will you please give it to this organization. They need it more than I do." God will always take care of your needs if you trust Him. If you are lowly enough...I have more than abundance, by God's grace, when it comes to such things, all because of others' generosity. Then we can use it for others. To inherit the land means you're going to get what you need. You're going to get what you need, if you are meek! "Lord, I trust in you." You still have to work - "those who do not work should not eat." You don't just sit there and say, "I'm being meek, gimme, gimme, gimme." Those who do not work should not eat. It's that simple. We need to be meek enough to trust in God. We do the best we can, and let God fulfill our needs.

Verse 6: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness." We've talked about this before. If I were to ask you to give me the top ten things you want to do in your life, or your top ten goals, would any of them be to be holy? (Before this homily)! Would one of my goals already have been to be holy? Again it says in Scripture, "Without holiness we shall not see God." Holiness comes from Christ, it doesn't come from what I do, but it means that I participate and I'm obedient to Him and I'm a holy person. You can be holy as you are. You have to be doing everything for God. There were some great, holy people who were belligerent people sometimes. Padre Pio was one of them. He would insult people. The friars would go up to him and say, "Padre, you just insulted them." He'd say, "I know, it's what I wanted to do. He was miserable sometimes! You think, "How could he be holy?" Jesus was one who said some things that did not make people happy. It means that you have a DESIRE to be holy. It means you are set apart for God. That means your life is dedicated to God, and EVERYTHING YOU DO you do for God, and God alone. To be holy. Is that one of your desires?

Here you go. Verse 7. "Blessed are those who show mercy, for mercy shall be theirs."
Mercy again is giving something good to someone who doesn't deserve it. Am I a merciful person, or am I a justice person? God is the God of justice. He's also the God of mercy on this earth, but later on it will be justice. What he tells us is to be merciful, to be merciful, to be merciful, to be merciful. That's why our Divine Mercy Tech is called Divine Mercy...because what we preach is the mercy of God. Do you know why? Because the priest is in most need of mercy. Are we people of mercy in our lives? How would a person describe your life, put up against this beatitude? Would they say you are a person of mercy or a person of justice? What does Jesus say you are called to be?

Verse 8. "Blessed are the single hearted, for they shall see God." That means if your only desire in life is to do God's will, you're going to see Him again one day. Remember, I told you again and again, God gives you what you love the most. What you and I love the most on the day we die, that is what He will give us. A single-hearted person loves what the most? God the most...so you will see Him forever. If your one desire in life is to see God, and to be with God and to love God above all things, you're going to get it. Not only later on in life, but now! Today you will see God when? At Communion! If you are single-hearted, when I say, "The body of Christ," and I hold up the Blessed Sacrament, do you see God? Or do you see everything else? A single-hearted person will see God, will see Christ, not only later, but now! Did you see Him when you walked into this church today? Did you see God? Are you single-hearted, or did you see everything else? Did you see Christ? He's right there, looking at you.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God." We need to be people who work for peace. Peace isn't just the absence of war. Peace is wholeness. Do I work for peace? Sometimes to bring peace, you must be strong. Peace must be my goal in life. I'm a peacemaker. I'm one who brings sides together, and not divides sides, unless that's what God is calling me to do. To be a person of peace...

Finally, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for holiness' sake, for the reign of God is theirs. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great." Again, you can always tell a follower of Christ because they are going to cause controversy. I'm sorry, it's just going to be that way. Mother Teresa caused controversy...in India, among nuns in the United States who had no respect for her because she was an old-style nun. Mother Teresa was standing up for Christ. Each of us must do this. I was supposed to be the main speaker at the Youth Rally coming up, but I cause so much controversy that some people in the diocese said they would refuse to bring their kids up if Father Larry was speaking, because he's too harsh. I was kind of bent out of shape about the whole situation, kind of hurt by it, but they replaced me, because they didn't want to cause controversy. We need to cause controversy sometimes. I hope that the people who didn't want me to speak will be right next to me, on both sides, in heaven. I hope we are together forever. I do! But the reality is that sometimes when we speak the truth, people don't want to hear it. So, are we people that speak the truth? Do we cause controversy? Are we persecuted sometimes because of it? If it is so, don't be sad, be GLAD, because your reward in heaven is great! Got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know his love today and forever. Amen.