

Fourth Sunday *per annum*

Year A, 2026

Zep 2:3; 3:12-13 1 Cor 1:26-31

Ps 146

Mt 5:1-12a

Wisdom and the Beatitudes

Last Sunday, this Sunday, and for the two Sunday to come – for four weeks in a row – the second reading from St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians makes mention of wisdom and draws a distinction between the wisdom of the world – the wisdom of human standards and human eloquence, the wisdom of this age – and the wisdom of God and from God. Christ Jesus is that wisdom of and from God – a “*mysterious, hidden*” wisdom, now “*revealed to us through the Spirit*” (1 Cor 2:7, 10).

In the light of St Paul’s distinction between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom, let’s take a closer look at two of the beatitudes from today’s Gospel reading.

First, “*blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.*” Meekness is not timidity or passivity or weakness. Meekness is characterized rather by a strength that is bound and governed by humility, gentleness, and tenderness. The meek possess a strength that *serves* with lovingkindness, warmth, and righteousness. The meek seek to serve, not to be served; to loosen, not to bind; to liberate, not to dominate.

Jesus spoke this beatitude to those who did not own the land, but who were being dispossessed of the land promised them as their collective inheritance. The Promised Land of the Chosen People

had fallen under the control and domination of an invading and occupying force, the Romans, who were much stronger, much wealthier, militaristic, and who sought to extract from the land and its people whatever wealth and resources there were to be found in it, to enrich themselves and expand their empire.

For the occupying Roman forces, Galilee and Judea, Palestine and the Jordan were not home and certainly were not held to be a sacred gift from God, to be tenderly cared for and loved. And so they plundered and exploited. They raped the land of its resources, imposed onerous financial burdens, and cruelly treated the native population. The land was despoiled, ravaged, ruined ... much like the land's people and their livelihoods.

By contrast, the meek do not ruin the land. They do not pollute or overdevelop on an industrial scale. They do not hoard and devastate. They enjoy; they do not exploit. They delight; they do not devour. They are thankful and content with enough; they do not clamor for more, always more. The wisdom of the meek, a godly wisdom, can be heard in a verse from in the book of Proverbs (30:8-9):

Give me neither poverty nor riches;
provide me only with the food I need;
lest, being full, I deny you,
saying, "Who is the Lord?"
or, being in want, I steal,
and profane the name of my God.

Contrariwise, the wisdom of the world might sound something like, "The land belongs to those who control it." If by belong, we mean take. If by control, we mean dominate. Contrast that with "*Blessed the meek, for they shall inherit the land.*" Inherit, by which is meant receiving, not taking, and by which is understood stewardship, not domination. For taking is not the same as receiving, nor is domination the same as being given dominion.

If applying this wisdom to our own nation's present, in which some in positions of power and authority are proposing to take, by lethal military force, the land of others – Panama? Canada? Greenland? Gaza? – makes us uneasy, then wisdom is doing its work. This is hardly meekness, is it? Presently, our national strength does not seem to be governed by virtue, but by a thirst to assert power, as if might makes right. We do what we want because we can and no one can stop us. But this is immoral. Gravely immoral. It is my fear that our nation, once looked upon as a beacon of freedom and justice, is in danger of becoming the aggressor, the invader, the occupier, an unwanted force, a presence to be hated, resented, and finally ousted. In this, we place ourselves in moral and spiritual danger.

Now another beatitude, "*blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" We look at this beatitude first by considering what it does not say, and what it does not say is *blessed are the victors*. In a contest, there is a winner and a loser, the victor and the vanquished. There is a beatitude for the victors, if they have the wisdom to understand it: "*blessed are the merciful, for they will be*

shown mercy." That is wisdom for the victor. The vanquished, likewise, have their own beatitude, if they have the wisdom to receive it: *"blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted."* That is wisdom for the defeated.

But this beatitude, *"blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,"* is not about the victor or the vanquished. It is not about the parties who are at war with each other. It is about those who make peace, who reconcile the opposing parties, the warring bands. The ones who make peace – who come in between the opposing factions; who call them to selflessness, to good behavior, to the common good; who urge them to meekness and mercy and to turn their hearts toward those who are mourning in the wake of their warring – these will be called children of God.

War is a moral sickness. War is sin. War is a failure of our common humanity.

It should make us uncomfortable to think of our own role as either antagonist or attacker in all the little wars of our personal or professional lives, and to think of the divisions, devastations, and sorrows that have resulted. That is war on a petty scale.

On a grand scale, it should make us more than uncomfortable to consider the history *and the present* of our own nation, which has been at war, almost uninterrupted, for the past seventy-five years. This discomfort, in our minds and in our souls, means that wisdom is doing its work, bringing about repentance, *metanoia* even.

But if we feel the need to try to plead our cause, to defend our (mis)deeds, to excuse or justify our (mis)behavior, to have someone declare us the righteous party, the victor ... then that means there is still work for wisdom to do in us. But I wonder if there is still time to make peace before we are at war again.

Let's take one last and brief look at this beatitude by turning it inside out, to see if we may gain some insight by doing so. Turning things inside out can be interesting, or disturbing. It's one thing to see a *thing* inside out, like a sweater. It looks funny, with the yarn and threads going this way and that. It's another thing, though, to see a *body* turned inside out, like an animal on the dissecting table or a person on the operating table or an autopsied body in the morgue. That can be quite disturbing.

But what about a *soul* that is inside out? What would that be like?

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Inside out, that beatitude goes: "cursed are the warmongers, for they will be called the spawn of Satan." Cursed are those who make war, who sell war, who promote it and agitate for it, who profit by it, who cheer it on, who enjoy its spectacle! They are not children, but spawn. Their father is not God; their sire is the devil. A soul inside out is touched by the demonic. There is no beatitude for such, no blessing, no happiness. Only woe, pronounced by the prophet Isaiah:

Woe to you, destroyer, you who have not been destroyed! ...

When you stop destroying, you will be destroyed...

(Is 33:1, NIV).

But we are hardly peacemakers, are we? The shameful truth is that we delight in our petty personal wars and in our great national wars. We boast about being partisans of this war or that, imaging ourselves noble heirs of righteous causes. We proudly remember the wars in which our fathers shed the blood of their brothers. We romanticize and teach wars as the turning points of history, glossing over the horror and tragedy of them all. How shameful that we boast of such evils! Willingly we spend billions for the weapons of war. With difficulty we give only pennies for peace. O how little we care for being and for being called children of God! How little we care for peace or for the makers of peace! How foolishly we despise the beatitude, the happiness, taught and promised by Jesus, who is the wisdom of God.

Wisdom, we should now see, can be intensely subversive. It can and is meant to challenge our complacent and muddled thinking, to confound our comfortably unexamined preconceptions, and to coax us into aligning our thoughts, our wants, our words, and our deeds so as to be pleasing God, and not to the spirit of the age. To those who will see, and hear, and understand, the beatitudes teach true wisdom, not the wisdom of the world, but the mind of God himself.

Here is wisdom! Be attentive! And repent, *metanoete*, the kingdom of heaven is at hand!