

HOMILY SUNDAY 4-A (Homily 02)

“Prophetic Humility”

(Zephaniah 2:3, 12-13; Ps 146; 1 Cor 1:26-31; Mt 5:1-12)

Richard Rohr once began a retreat to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Saskatoon with the words, “You are who you are who you are – what are you afraid of?”

Those words cut to the chase. Christian life, following Jesus, is first and foremost about truthfulness and humility. Let us therefore strive to be humble, for humility is a prophetic kingdom attitude.

It should be no surprise to see that the first major address of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is the Beatitudes. That Sermon on the Mount is his Magna Carta, a summary of his whole life. That sermon incarnates or embodies the values of the Kingdom of God that he came to inaugurate here on earth as gift from the Father to those who believe and would follow him.

It is interesting to note that all but two of the Beatitudes are cast in the future tense. We read that the gentle *will* inherit the earth, those who mourn *will* be comforted, the pure of heart *shall* see God, etc. Only the first Beatitude and the last, about the humble and the persecuted, are cast in both the present and future tense – theirs *is* the kingdom of God now, yet their reward will also be great in heaven.

This means that to live the Beatitudes is to be prophetic both in showing the way into the future and also in demonstrating that the Kingdom of Heaven is a present reality. We can both look forward to the vindication of the good, the righteous and the just in the coming reign of God in its fullness, yet also rejoice in living in that kingdom of God right here and now, through humility and patient suffering of injustice from a world that is focused on other values.

Those values are the ones that Jesus faced in the Temptations, namely, possessions/pleasure, prestige and power. That is what the world values, what the world understands and what the world clings to.

Not only that, the world will actively react against anyone who questions these values by living another way of life, a Beatitude way of life. This is what happened to Jesus; this is what we can expect will happen to the followers of Jesus. They will not easily be at home in this world of self-serving values.

This in part explains the vociferous reaction that those who promote a pro-life message in our society often experience, as their message is judged to be unacceptable in a sophisticated society that allows the termination of thousands of unborn lives. That is why the CBC will put on the national news a small group protesting the hunting of baby seals, yet totally ignore 20,000 people gathered in Ottawa for a pro-life march. The Beatitudes are certainly a counter-cultural way of life that makes those who live them prophetic.

The second reading points out another attitude that will mark the true believer and follower of Jesus, the attitude of gratitude. We really have nothing to boast about. All that we have and are is gift from God. St. Paul emphasizes that we have received wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption from God through Jesus Christ – and not through any effort of our own. All is gift from the Father.

The liberation theologian from South America, Gustavo Gutierrez, understood this well. He advised his audience in Edmonton years ago that if they wanted to come to South America because they were angry about injustice or because they felt guilty that they had so much and those in South America had so little, they should stay home – they would not be helpful, as there were already lots of angry and guilty people in South America. However, if their motivation to go to South America was out of gratitude for what God has given them, then they could come, they would be welcome and helpful. South America could always use more grateful people. He knew that a grateful person is a humble person, and that virtue is a kingdom value that would help them build up the reign of God in South America.

Rohr's comment earlier about knowing who we are, underlines another dimension of a truly humble person, and that is self awareness. Someone who is humble has made the inner journey into the shadow side of him or her self. They are aware of who they are and have nothing to hide. They have admitted their wrong doing, and are aware of their sinfulness that has made them act in hurtful ways. They have repented, received forgiveness for their sins, and are on healing journeys of dealing with their sinfulness or their defects of character that caused them to sin in the first place. They are also at home with their virtues, their skills and personal qualities. They can freely and gratefully accept compliments and let their light shine before others to the glory of God their Father. They can do this precisely because they know that all is gift from God for which they are grateful.

These humble people are the salt of the earth, in whom the Spirit of Jesus is at work, and upon whom He can build the reign of God here on earth, even if it will

only be fully realized in the next life. The late Mary Jacobson of Ile-a-la-Crosse was one such person. Almost bedridden with crippling arthritis, she was nevertheless one of the most cheerful persons on earth, always ready to welcome visitors and constantly praying for the needs of others. She was truly a beatitude person in whose presence people felt the love of God for them and for the world.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a humble meal that fills us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and transforms us into Beatitude people.

Let us respond by striving to be humble, for humility is a prophetic kingdom attitude, one that sums up all the Beatitudes that Jesus taught us and asks us to live.