

The Fourth Week in Ordinary Time
January 29, 2017

Did you ever wonder why Jesus would say: *Blessed* are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who thirst for justice? Is it possible that Jesus recognized that in some of the world's cultures, and maybe even our own, the tendency is to place too high of a value on self-reliance?

We sometimes, perhaps often, imagine that we can rely only on our own personal strength to overcome spiritual struggle or to face the life's numerous challenges. Certainly our culture promotes self-interest and self-reliance, and "pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps."

But if we buy into this type of thinking, there will be a tendency to believe that we will only get as far as our own efforts will take us. When that happens, we risk losing sight of the fact that we are beloved children of God and that God desires a deep and personal relationship with us.

Sometimes we might feel alone and unworthy of God's love. We are filled with many concerns and worries. And we end up calling on God only when our efforts fail, when life teaches us that we are not in control of everything that life throws at us. Sometimes we can inadvertently fall into the trap of being arrogant when we fail to realize that in our spiritual struggles we need to depend on God's help.

Instead, we prefer to overcome our inadequacies on our own. But if we honestly search our memories we can find multiple examples for each beatitude where we have failed.

For example, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*: How often are we filled with a sense of self-righteousness when we think we've been slighted or treated rudely resulting in a less than Christ-like response?

Blessed are the meek: How often has pride kept us from helping someone in need because we don't want to get involved or we're in a hurry?

Blessed are they who show mercy: How often are we angry about the stories of injustice that are broadcast on a daily basis, and yet don't take the time to do anything in response? With each example of failure on our part we can lose a sense of hope that God loves us. It is in these times that humility will allow us to know that we need God's love and forgiveness to be more Christ-like, to become more like the person God has created us to be.

In today's first reading Zephaniah gives us some great advice: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth, who observed his law; seek justice, seek humility ..." It is these faithful servants who Jesus calls blessed.

This is not to deny our giftedness. Each of us has been endowed with wonderful gifts to further God's kingdom.

In the second reading Paul encourages us that when recognition for these gifts comes our way we should boast in the Lord, not in ourselves. That's why the Beatitudes serve as the perfect reminder of the attitudes we ought to have.

So when we fall short in living out the Beatitudes, we can turn to the words of St. Anselm to strengthen our desire to increase our desire to be disciples of Jesus: "Hope of my heart, strength of my soul, help of my weakness, by your powerful kindness complete what in my powerlessness I attempt ... although I have not yet attained to love you as I ought, still let my desire for you be as great as my love ought to be."