

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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WHEN I was a little kid, my mom loved to play records and cassette tapes – remember those? -- in our dining room. The dining room had a south-facing bay window that was full of plants. And hanging in the bay window was a single crystal prism, which would refract the bright sunlight and send colors dancing around the room. My mom would play John Denver, Jackson Five, Joan Baez, Al Jarreau, Metallica...

Okay, not Metallica.

But I especially loved when mom would put on a record of classical music -- with its chipper Vivaldi, staccatoed Bach, and lyrical Mozart. My younger siblings and I would run around the table for what felt like hours to *Rondo alla Turca*. When my mom saw us skipping around in circles, she would give that crystal prism a spin, flinging light all over the room. It was a poor man's disco ball – and we loved it. For a kid, it was a taste of heaven.

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Inevitably, the simplicities of childhood give way to the complexities of adulthood. This has been an interesting and challenging few weeks in our country. We see how earthly power shifts so quickly, affecting so many people so deeply. We have had marches for women, and a march for the legal protection of the unborn...

But we have also seen hope-filled migrants and refugees arriving at our front door to make a new life -- only to be frozen out at the doorstep. Politics and religion have intermingled in unsavory ways, instilling mutual mistrust and animosity among people of good will.

What does it mean to be *Christian* and *American*?

How about *Muslim* and *American*?

People at home and abroad are uncertain of our future -- which leads to an anxiety that dampens our hope, and darkens our dreams for the future. How do we make sense of all this darkness? What makes for reliable happiness in the face of life's complexities?

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I thought of that crystal prism from my childhood when I read the Beatitudes from today's Gospel. If you're like me, you want to understand what ultimate happiness – *beatitude* – looks like. But try as we might to understand ultimate happiness, and eternal life, we don't get to see all of reality -- at least not in this world. But the Beatitudes, which Jesus proclaims in Matthew's Gospel today, take that ultimate happiness – eternal life with God – and break it down like a prism for us to see, to understand, and to enact in this world. Beginning right here, right now.

Jesus is straightforward in Matthew's Gospel, and he overturns all the world's expectations of strength, power, and happiness:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

*You want to experience true riches? -- Jesus might ask us -- Then stop trying to fill your house...your mind...your schedule...stop filling your life with **stuff**. Stop clinging to things, and open your hands to receive what God has on offer.*

"Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted."

*You want to be comfortable? Then let your honest sadness and real losses break your heart. Stop running **from** life's pains...but move **through** them, to the new life on the other side of them.*

"Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land."

You want to have something to hold onto in the world? Then share what little you have, and see all the good that returns to you.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied."

You want to live a life of meaning and purpose? Our egos are hungry wolves. What if instead of taking care of number one, you use your influence and talents and voice to help those who are voiceless? Then you will find meaning and purpose. Then you will be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy."

You want to be well-regarded? To have good relationships? Then ask yourself, "Who in life am I unwilling to forgive...and why? Who threatens my pride and sense of security...and why?"

"Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God."

You want to know and understand God's will for your life? Then see about simplifying your life: your schemings, your compromises, your half-truths. Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no.

"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God."

Do we want God to protect America, as His beloved children? Then let's not pick fights with our siblings – especially those who are weaker than us.

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

You want to have eternal life with God? Then remember that what we fight for in this world – and what we ignore -- echoes in the halls of eternity.

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Where does Jesus' vision of ultimate happiness – *beatitude* – resonate with you? Do any of these Beatitudes strike a chord, or cause you to wince today? Paul writes of our call as Christians in our second reading:

*Consider your own calling, brothers and sisters.
Not many of you were wise by human standards,
not many were powerful,
not many were of noble birth.
But God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise,
and the weak of the world to shame the strong,
and the lowly and despised of the world...
so that no human being might boast before God.*

Where do you and I settle for a vision of the world that is *less than* the beatific vision? Where is Christ calling us to greater childlike trust, seeking out His will in the tired corners of our heart? In our world? Where do we need to grow in what Rick Gaillardetz calls “the spiritual habits of recognition”? Where do we see glimpses of the Kingdom of God?

In times of uncertainty and complexity, we need to let the light of Christ into our darkness; to pay attention to how that light is refracted in our hearts; where it is cast far and wide in this world, which is broken and in need of healing.

And we need to find room to dance around the table again.

To hear that music of the heavens.

To see where the light of Christ is refracted in 10,000 places all around us. To search for glimpses of that beatific vision which is around us, if we but pay attention.

*Rejoice, and be glad,
For yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.*