

Suggested Reading

This week you may wish to read the following passages from the Bible.

A Recommended Reading

Matthew 8:1 - 10:42

B Read Carefully

<i>Matthew 10:1-42</i>	<i>The Mission Sermon</i>
<i>Matthew 8:1-9:38</i>	<i>The Preceding Narrative</i>
<i>Matthew 10:17-25</i>	<i>Persecution</i>
<i>Matthew 10:40-11:1</i>	<i>The Conclusion</i>

Prayer

O God, who by the pages of both Testaments
Instruct and prepare us to celebrate the Paschal Mystery,
Grant that we may comprehend your mercy,
So that the gifts we receive from you this night
may confirm our hope of the gifts to come.
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Easter Vigil)

PFP v6 2/2020

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

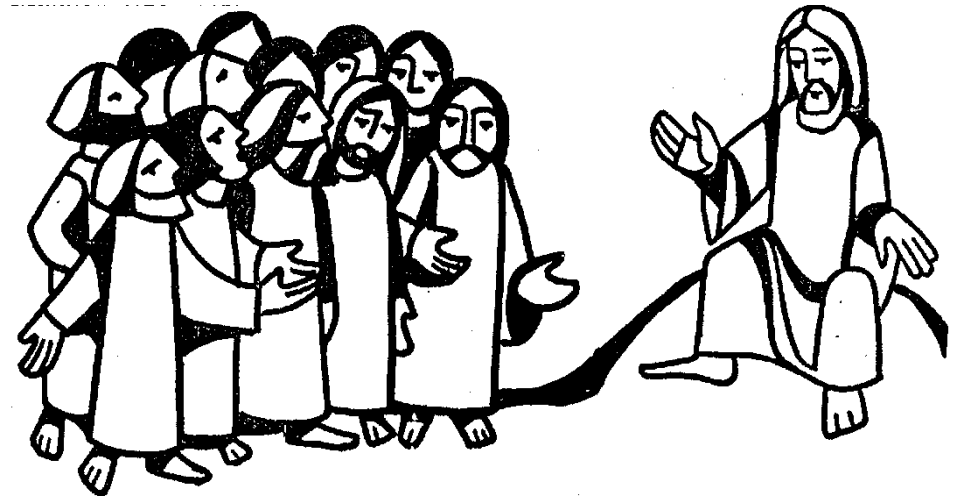
Henley on Thames



The Sermon on the Mount.

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Matthew 4:23 - 7:29



The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous discourses throughout the Gospels. It contains many of the best-known passages from the New Testament, including the Beatitudes, the Our Father, the command to love our enemies and the 'golden rule' of Christian life. However, because of its profundity it is seldom read as a whole. This is because whole chapters could be devoted to each passage, (the Catechism of the Catholic Church devotes 24 pages to the Our Father.) To consider such a sermon in this limited space is both a challenge and a joy.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with *The Beatitudes*. They are at the heart of Jesus' preaching. The Beatitudes have been described as everything from a manifesto of Christian living, to the promise and description of our eternal life with God. In this sense they describe the path that would lead us to the kingdom of heaven, while helping us, throughout our daily lives.

The Old Testament has a special concern for the widow, the orphan and stranger; mindful that Israel was a stranger in the land of Egypt. The *poor in spirit* are blessed because they rely upon God's special care for them. This presumes humility, a detachment from wealth and a voluntary poverty. This differs from the biblical view of poverty as an evil to be overcome and riches as a blessing. The *meek* might be described as one who is slow to anger, gentle with others, or charitable in nature. The *merciful* would fulfil the later commandments: to pardon a neighbour, look after the needy and love one's enemies. Wise judgement, *purity of heart*, and the role of *peacemaker* shares the perspective of the King or a Priest. This role is now open to all and required of all. Purity of heart goes beyond ritual purity to the recesses of a person. The peacemaker may be understood to be a state of 'wholeness' or well-being which is filled with the peace of God. The Beatitudes will be ultimately fulfilled in the kingdom of heaven. Each of the Beatitudes are in the future tense except the first and the last which describe the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted.

The true disciple is one who with the spirit of the Beatitudes will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Salt is both a spice and a preservative, so is a good teacher.

In Matthew's Gospel, the five sermons parallel the five books of the Law (Torah). Jesus is contrasted with Moses, the recipient and teacher of the Law at Mt Sinai. Jesus gives the new law from this mountain (of the Beatitudes). However, Jesus has not come to abolish the law, ... but complete it. (*Mtt 5:17*) The law is fulfilled in Christ. His teaching is greater than Moses. He has the authority to re-interpret its meaning. Jesus seeks to fulfil the letter and the spirit of the law.

Jesus' teaching seeks to go beyond the Old Testament teaching by deepening and radicalising it. Jesus aims at a higher moral standard which regulates the intentions of the heart, making the actions which the law prohibits unnecessary. Jesus shifts the emphases from murder to the anger which could occasion such an action. While murder is a relatively rare temptation, anger is common experience. By this teaching Jesus brings the fifth commandment '*thou shall not kill*' away from the

Next Week

The Mission Sermon

Matthew emphasises the teaching of Jesus. The next section of the Gospel (*Mtt 8:1 - 9:38*) contains ten miracle stories which stress the activity of Jesus and his disciples. Here Matthew follows the framework of Mark but summarises the miracles in his own style.

The second part of this section is the second of the five sermons: The Mission Discourse. (*Mtt 10:1-42*) All of the passages within this section are loosely associated with the mission of the twelve disciples.

It begins by describing their mission to the people of Israel and concludes by acknowledging the rejection they will face. The way of the disciple is to follow the master. The disciples and the reader are invited to follow the way of Jesus which includes for Matthew's readers the reality of persecution.

Jesus and the Law

As Jewish thought developed inwardly, it became increasingly plain that the real bread from heaven that fed and feeds Israel is precisely the Law – the word of God.

The Law has become a person. When we encounter Jesus, we feed on the living God himself, so to speak; we truly eat "bread from heaven".

Ratzinger, Joseph, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration.* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007) Pg 267. 268.

The Life of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel



preserve of the few, into the daily life. The same principle applies for impurity, divorce, oaths and retaliation.

The ruling '*an eye for an eye*' (*Ex 21:23-25 = Mtt 5:38*) sounds barbarous today. However, its original purpose was to set a limit on revenge. (*One eye for one eye.*) It was to stop the cycle of hatred dominating relations for generations. At the time of Jesus, the Rabbis already felt that this ruling was too harsh. They began commuting the penalty to fines while keeping the principle of restitution. The intention behind Jesus' teaching on divorce was to set out a clear and high ideal of human relations. This was based on the covenant relationship between God and his people, which the covenanted love of husband and wife mirrors. The radicalism of the Christian way of life is witnessed by the commandment to love your enemies. This is linked to a passive resistance that would seek to overcome one's aggressor by peaceful means.

The next section of the sermon concerns the intimacy between the Father and the disciple which finds its greatest expression in the Lord's Prayer. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting which are the response to God's initiative, are directed to the '*Father who sees in secret*'. We are taught to pray using the words which Jesus gave us: '*Our Father.*' This prayer has been described as a summary of the Gospel. It is also at the centre of the Sermon on the Mount, both figuratively and literally. This sermon is an invitation to follow the ways of God with greater devotion, to make the qualities of the Beatitudes our own.

It is a calling to a higher moral life. One cannot be the slave of two masters. The disciple is urged to store up treasure in heaven, and make this a single-minded goal, which nothing might hinder. This is the meaning of the parable of the sensible and foolish one. Those who listen to the words of Jesus and act upon them are sensible, whereas to choose another way leads to destruction.

The sermon may be summed up by the *Golden Rule*. (*Mtt 7:12*) '*Always treat others as you would like them to treat you, that us the Law and the Prophets*'. This verse may be placed alongside the commandment of Jesus to love one another as he has loved us.

IN BRIEF

1725 *The Beatitudes take up and fulfil God's promises from Abraham on by ordering them to the Kingdom of heaven. They respond to the desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart.*

1726 *The Beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life, filiation, rest in God.*

1727 *The beatitude of eternal life is a gratuitous gift of God. It is supernatural, as is the grace that leads us there.*

1728 *The Beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning earthly goods; they purify our hearts in order to teach us to love God above all things.*

1729 *The beatitude of heaven sets the standards for discernment in the use of earthly goods in keeping with the law of God.*

2764 The Sermon on the Mount is teaching for life, the *Our Father* is a prayer; but in both the one and the other the Spirit of the Lord gives new form to our desires, those inner movements that animate our lives. Jesus teaches us this new life by his words; he teaches us to ask for it by our prayer. The rightness of our life in him will depend on the rightness of our prayer.

It is the work

of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit and through him it becomes the interior law of charity: 'I will establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel. . . I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'¹⁹

1966 The New Law is the *grace of the Holy Spirit* given to the faithful through faith in Christ. It works through charity; it uses the Sermon on the Mount to teach us what must be done and makes use of the sacraments to give us the grace to do it:

If anyone should meditate with devotion and perspicacity on the sermon our Lord gave on the mount, as we read in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, he will doubtless find there. . . the perfect way of the Christian life. . . This sermon contains. . . all the precepts needed to shape one's life.²⁰

1967 The Law of the Gospel 'fulfils', refines, surpasses and leads the Old Law to its perfection.²¹ In the Beatitudes, the New Law *fulfils the divine promises* by elevating and orienting them toward the 'kingdom of heaven'. It is addressed to those open to accepting this new hope with faith – the poor, the humble, the afflicted, the pure of heart, those persecuted on account of Christ – and so marks out the surprising ways of the Kingdom.

1968 The Law of the Gospel *fulfils the commandments* of the Law. The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or devaluing the moral prescriptions of the Old Law, releases their hidden potential and has new demands arise from them: it reveals their entire divine and human truth. It does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where man chooses between the pure and the impure,²² where faith, hope and charity are formed, and with them the other virtues. The Gospel thus brings the Law to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of the heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors, in emulation of the divine generosity.²³

1969 The New Law *practises the acts of religion*: almsgiving, prayer and fasting, directing them to the 'Father who sees in secret', in contrast with the desire to 'be seen by men'.²⁴ Its prayer is the *Our Father*.²⁵