

4th Sunday, yr. A, Xavier Church, Zeph. 2, 3; 3, 12-13; Ps. 146, 7-10; 1 Cor. 1, 26-31; Mat. 5, 1-12a

Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, what might St. Paul have been thinking about when he wrote: 'Rather, God chose the foolish of the world, the weak and the lowly and despised?' Probably, his first thought was of the Corinthians, to whom he wrote the letter. They were pursuing wisdom, but they were not acting on it. There were disputes among themselves within the Christian community about who they should follow as leaders. But what Paul is really about when he writes his letter is to proclaim Christ. The fact that Christ died on the cross may seem like foolishness to many people, but it is actually a power of God for those who are saved, for us. God assumed human weakness in Jesus. His parents Mary and Joseph led a very simple life, in that sense Jesus' lineage was not from a rich family. Yet He is the one who saves us, from sin. In today's gospel, with the Beatitudes, He reaches out to us with a perspective we can live by in the mundane, with a view to heaven.

The first four Beatitudes express our dependence as believers on God's grace. The expression 'poor in spirit' mainly refers to an attitude of simplicity and humility, of saying 'yes' to what the Lord asks of us, just as Mary did. She will have had much grief, seeing her Son die on the cross. But at the same time, she was filled with hope, because Jesus had said He would be glorified and this did indeed happen, with his resurrection and ascension.

The next beatitude promises that the meek will possess the land, even if sometimes it takes struggle to defend your land, as in Ukraine. There are others who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We can think of the people who work for the Jesuit Refugee Services, who provide education in the many refugee camps in the world.

The following four beatitudes concern various aspects of human justice, in response to the justice of God. Those who are merciful, who are good to others, they will also experience mercy themselves.

Those who keep their hearts pure and do not go along with the temptations of this world, they will receive a blessing from the Lord, namely in the blissful beholding of our God, who is love. And those who promote peace, by opposing conflict, by living without iniquity, they are like trusted members of God's family, as 'children of God'. Finally, those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice are called blessed. Those who are unjustly accused or opposed. Just as to the poor in spirit in the first beatitude, to them belongs the kingdom of heaven. This belonging is a reason to rejoice, despite the difficulties we face here on earth.

The prophet Zephaniah, whom we heard in the first reading, advises us to keep seeking righteousness, truth and humility. He was a prophet in the seventh century BC. After Isaiah and Micah, no prophetic voice had been heard for three quarters of a century and then came Zephaniah. He prophesied that the Lord will turn against pride and that a new people will come who will be humble and who will be assured of food, rest and security. Of course, this is no reason to sit back quietly. There is still much injustice in our world and untruths are being told. We can prayerfully ask God how we can do our part to bring more justice and truth to our world and then act on it. God has promised us in Jesus the coming of the Spirit, the Helper, who will assist us in all things, when we try to fulfil his will. Amen.