



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
January 29, 2017



Introduction to the Word:

A few weeks ago we celebrated a festive season and many of us made New Year resolutions. Every Christmas we long for and pray for peace—peace on earth and peace in our communities. And regularly we renew our hopes, our intentions and start over again as we experience the weaknesses of the human condition. Humans long to belong, we hunger for harmony, and yet we are funny creatures, as at times we avoid divisions and the pain they may present. Fear, mistrust, old hurts, or alienation may discourage us from addressing disunity. We have been calling that the Baggage of Life. Let's review where our series has led us so far

Week number one we saw there is often baggage in life which comes in forms of hurdles, hurts and heresies. We were encouraged to not covet the baggage of this world, but to seek the Light – the Star – follow it – and drop the baggage. Week number two our call was to recall that sometimes we can feel trapped and that there can be “prisons” of our own creation and choosing which bind us. So we are called to release and let go” of the baggage by allowing ourselves to be reshaped by God and know His vision for us which give us ultimate freedom. Week three we tackled a basic biblical fact - **God has a way of making the most wonderful from the least expected.**

Warm-Up:

The Beatitudes present us with nine ways of being and doing that lead us to God, to the fulfillment of His will, and to the faithful living of a Christian life. Discuss what they mean to you and how they apply to your personal journey as a Disciple.

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

We celebrate God's gift of mercy:



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Lord Jesus, you help us to recognize the mercy of the Father
Christ Jesus, thank you for this invitation to new life and grace
Lord Jesus, may we share your great mercy today

Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING:

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13

Seek the Lord, all you, the humble of the earth, who obey his commands. Seek integrity, seek humility; you may perhaps find shelter on the day of the anger of the Lord.

In your midst I will leave a humble and lowly people, and those who are left in Israel will seek refuge in the name of the Lord. They will do no wrong, will tell no lies; and the perjured tongue will no longer be found in their mouths. But they will be able to graze and rest with no one to disturb them. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Take yourselves for instance, brothers, at the time when you were called: how many of you were wise in the ordinary sense of the word, how many were influential people, or came from noble families? No, it was to shame the wise that God chose what is foolish by human reckoning, and to shame what is strong that he chose what is weak by human reckoning; those whom the world thinks common and contemptible are the ones that God has chosen—those who are nothing at all to show up those who are everything. The human race has nothing to boast about to God, but you, God has made members of Christ Jesus, and by God's doing he has become our wisdom, and our virtue, and our holiness, and our freedom. As scripture says: if anyone wants to boast, let him boast about the Lord. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL:

Matthew 5:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: "How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Happy the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage. Happy



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

those who mourn: they shall be comforted. Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied. Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Happy the pure in heart: they shall see God. Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God. Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

William Shakespeare wrote, in the *Merchant of Venice*, "Mercy is twice blest: it blesseth him that gives and him that takes". We, who have received God's mercy, are blessed abundantly when we extend mercy to others.

[You may also as a group wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord's Day Message](#)

[Consider this article from our Parish Blog on Prayer as further reflection material](#)

The Beatitudes are a rich treasure of God's revelation. I have often thought of them as a road map that Jesus gives us, to tell us how to get to our destination—happiness and fulfillment here and now, and eternal life in the future. Each Beatitude calls us to be and do for others. Each one calls us to bear witness, by our lives, that we belong to Christ. We are His people. The Beatitudes reflect a solidarity that not only accompanies the other in a grace-filled way, but raises them up to a new and fuller life in God. In particular, for this Sunday, we have highlighted the virtue of mercy - "Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them". By embracing it, we are opening ourselves to not only abundant grace, but the power of God to express and live out the other Beatitudes in love and praise of God. This is our great challenge today.

God's Word teaches us that Mercy is the path to true joy. That the more we allow Mercy to flow through us the more it grows in us. Once we eliminate the rivals of bitterness, pleasure, power, and make Christ's providence the priority in our lives we begin to live like saints and even see the saints that God has put in our lives.

In the Beatitudes, the Son of God tells us what every one of us, deep down, wants to know: how to be happy even in the tragic baggage, in the dense fog, in the confining prison. So we must listen with great attentiveness. At the heart of the program is the beatitude: blessed are the merciful. This is because mercy is a participation in the divine life itself. All of the other beatitudes center around and relate to this one. Mercy is the standalone way to be free and become a saint



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

In the Gospel Jesus goes up the mountain - just like Moses when he sought to get the commandments and He comes down. The disciples come and sit at his feet and in these paths He says over and over to His followers - want to understand God - comprehend Mercy - look for it, see it, seek it, share it, life it. Jesus seems to ask them - do you become happy, fulfilled and free?

Now remember - they were under Roman oppression - they knew no freedom. Now recall - they had seen tragedy in their life and much confusion. Now replay for yourself that all they knew was set backs. So when Jesus was about to tell them the key to freedom: they wanted answers, they demanded vengeance and they wanted some to tell them go for the jugular, but Jesus says - conformed to mercy - the more you give of it - the more of it you get - Blessed are you!

And then He goes to something which I want to stop and focus on for just a minute - Jesus speaks of being pure of heart - single hearted. Division leads to unhappiness ...Mercy leads to unity. Want happiness? Well, then figure out if you are divided. Want to figure out if you are divided? Ask yourself where is your heart? What is it that you hunger and thirst for?

So let's return to life and let's go full circle to where we began three weeks ago in this series:

Life has baggage

Life has moments where we feel trapped - prisons we are in or carry

Life has times which makes us fog people

But life has an end too..... this chapter is not for eternity - there is another home for that

The lessons of life can make us miserable - we can give them that power - or the lessons of life can lead us to mercy. We can carry the baggage, remain in the prison, live in the fog or we can allow them to teach us that the tragedy of life - resulted by this side of heaven being imperfect - can become a teachable moment to communicate consolation to another. Does that mean we should never have those moments - no - we all will

We shall grieve the loss of a loved one - and rightly so. We shall be saddened by an opportunity that did not go our way. We shall momentarily despair at a result which challenges our future or a door which closes where we thought the walkway was leading - all of these are important - all of these have their moments, all of these Jesus speaks of in the Beatitudes - but He speaks of them as stops not stations - as pauses not positions. Mercy is the standalone stop - Mercy to understand, Mercy to walk with, Mercy to teach even in tragedy

So here is what I want to leave you with as we finish this first month of the 2017. Where do you need to let Mercy into your life? What have you been carrying around? Who have you been carrying around that needs to be dropped and replaced with Mercy? Where do you need to ask - *"Cannot life's punishments also be gifts?"* and then say - Lord teach me - **BLESSED ARE YOU IF YOU DO**



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: (15-20 minutes)

(Matthew 5:1-12) *"Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them"*

The Beatitudes show us the way to God and his kingdom.

- a) Is there a particular Beatitude that speaks to you and your experience? Why?
- b) Which Beatitude presents the biggest challenge for you?

Reflect back together as a group on the themes for each of the four weeks of this series – which ones struck you or stayed with you? Discuss why?

Intercessions:

Leader: Our response: Lord Hear us

For our Holy Father, the Bishops, our Pastor, and all the Pastors of the Church, may the Lord give them the graces they require as they lead God's people. We pray to the Lord.

That those suffering from famine may receive the food and assistance they need to grow in health and strength. Let us pray also for our parish mission work in Haiti, Kenya and for persecuted Christians in the Middle East especially our parish mission in the Holy Land. We pray to the Lord.

That the dignity of all human life, from the moment of conception until natural death, be respected and that we promote respect for all of God's creation. We pray to the Lord.

That young people, especially those enrolling for the Sacrament of Confirmation, may turn to Christ, the gentle and loving Shepherd, and find in Him the meaning and purpose of their lives. We pray to the Lord.

For loved one and family members who are away from the practice of the faith or who wandered from the church and carry heavy baggage, that they may return to God and His Church and find freedom. We pray to the Lord.

For our loved ones who have died, and for all the intentions recorded in the Parish Book of Prayer. We pray to the Lord.



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

Leader: Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray: **Hail Mary**

Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and “outreach” to the larger community.)

GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT

Please consider offering a **Holy Hour in our Adoration Chapel** – either as a group or individually – for the intentions of the parish common good and for the objectives of our pastoral priorities. Remember also our Pastor, our Pastoral Team.

Continue our theme of mercy and recognize how this week your forgiveness and understanding of others—at home, at work, at school, among friends—may go beyond its 'normal' expression to reflect the mercy (2+2=5) of the Father.

Choose one of the Beatitudes each day of the week, and try to concentrate on that virtue and how to exemplify it to the people in your life that day.

GROUP ACTION:

- ✓ Our parish is blessed with two young men discerning the Call of Priesthood. Would your group consider writing a letter of encouragement to either Hayden or Robin – see Father Freitas for address and details.
- ✓ St Patrick Parish in downtown Hamilton offers a food kitchen and outreach for 150 people a day, seven days a week. They have reached out to us as a dynamic parish in our Diocese asking for a donations of the following – would your small group consider collecting some of these items and donating them as we seek to help the poor and disadvantaged in Hamilton. Collect and donate cans of coffee, sugar, bottled water, pop or chocolate bars... It might sound a bit “unhealthy” menu, but precisely that’s what our patrons need as many of them deal with many different forms of addiction and mental health issues. These can be placed in the Adoration Chapel Hallway – mark them “Hamilton.”
- ✓ Looking back over your week (or ahead to the coming week), was there (or will there be) an invitation or challenge for you to be Jesus’ disciple? How can you help each other in your walk of faith?

Let us pray (together)

O God,
whose love and mercy knows no bounds:



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May we embrace the Beatitudes
and live a life that bears witness to you
in all that we say and do.

You call us to the fullness of life here and now,
and to share in life with you in the future.

Help us to show mercy
to those we meet tomorrow,
those we meet this week,
so that we will share with them the mercy
that we have received—
the mercy of the Father.

We ask this in the name
of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

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