

All Saints 2017
MT 5:1-12

While on my leave of absence from priestly ministry, I lived in Roanoke, Virginia. Roanoke is situated in a valley surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains and Roanoke is beautiful. One brilliantly sunny Saturday morning in October, a good friend and I took a hike up the mountains to Macabe's Knob which overlooks a valley. And sitting upon a rock protruding the side of the mountain and overlooking a gorgeous valley of fall foliage, you can't help but think of the omnipotence of God who created such a spot, and say to yourself, "This place is just a little bit of heaven right here on earth."

This morning's gospel begins Our Blessed Lord's famous Sermon on the Mount, and I'd like to think Jesus took the crowd up to the "Mount" to just such a place - **"a little bit of heaven right here on earth"** - as he taught them about heaven, about what life will be like after they died. For at that time Jews didn't believe in heaven. They believed that after they died, they might go to Sheol, a place of light and happiness and peace, but a place where God was not.

And they also believed that if they were suffering in any way, either because they were sick, or they were poor, or someone had died, or whatever, they were taught that they must have done something to deserve their suffering. John 9 gives insight to the mentality of the time. As Jesus and the apostles came across a man born blind, they asked him, "Master who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?"

As Our Blessed Lord preached the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus worked that crowd. He knew well they were a people without hope; they were taught that they suffered because they deserved it; and they had no hope for heaven – they never heard of heaven, and he knew what made their hearts so heavy:

- ✓ When he blessed the poor in spirit, he looked right at a woman whom everyone knew was suffering from depression and there was no Zoloft 2000 years ago
- ✓ When he blessed those who mourn, he looked right at a young dad who buried his three year old son and understandably, that man hasn't been the same ever since
- ✓ When he blessed the meek, he looked right at a guy who didn't have the self confidence to find a decent job – what

he made working that day was spent to feed his family that night.

- ✓ And if it were Our Blessed Lord sitting next to me up at Macabe's Knob rather than my friend from Roanoke, Jesus would have said, "And blest are the conflicted, for they shall find their answer." Because Jesus would have read my heart as well as he read that crowd and he knew I was having quite a time discerning my way back to the priesthood.

The crowd never expected these Beatitudes. It's not that they never heard this method or format of teaching. The *TANAK*, the Hebrew Scriptures were filled with it:

Deuteronomy 28:1: "Blessed are you who heed the Lord's voice and observe all the commandments the Lord enjoins on you today. The Lord God will raise you high above all the nations of the earth."

Sirach 26:1: "Blest the husband of a really good wife; twice lengthened are his days."

And in Psalms 84:5: "Blest are they who dwell in your house; they will continually praise you."

While the Old Testament beatitudes make sense, with Matthew, there was apparent contradiction.

Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall be satisfied. The word Matthew uses for "satisfied" is *kortazo*.

Kortazo means being stuffed, being over-satisfied by God; receiving a super-abundance, more than enough. And if you really think about it, we are rarely if ever really satisfied.

As kids, do you remember Christmas? Remember how you couldn't wait for Christmas? You couldn't wait for that toy? How happy you would be once you got that toy? Well Christmas came, and Christmas went, and you no longer play with that toy. You're not satisfied.

Vacation! You look forward to that vacation; all I need is a week away in the sun; I'll be satisfied. Well you came back and it took two weeks to find the top of your desk. It's like you never went on vacation in the first place. You're not satisfied. You can't wait for your next vacation.

You couldn't wait to get married. All I want to do is get married. It was marriage that would bring you perfect happiness. And even though it did bring a measure of happiness, you admit that you now take your spouse's love for granted . . . You're not really satisfied.

You look forward to that new job . . . in the eyes of some, a limelight position, a step up, where I can use my talents best. And in six months later, you're out there networking, making sure there's no missed opportunities . . . never really satisfied.

I had two conversations about this very topic this past week. What it takes to be happy.

You find as life goes on that we'd like to be perfectly happy, perfectly satisfied, but we're not. Life seems to be a series of disappointments, shocks and disillusionments. And what was the reaction? Either you can become cynical or prayerful.

Cynical, in that life is a snare and a delusion and so you might as well get as much out of it as you possibly can. Looking out for no one else but me. What makes me happy is what I'll do. And find you're all the more disappointed.

Or prayerful, and realize that if you want happiness, it's because you must have been made for it. If you are disappointed here, it must be that you are seeking happiness in the wrong places. You must look for it somewhere else, namely, in God. **You were made by God, and you were made for God, and nothing short of God will ever satisfy you.**

Dissatisfaction, unhappiness is not due to wanting a fortune or a high position, or a better marriage, or fame, or whatever. The point is, we were made for perfect happiness. That is our purpose. God made us to be perfectly happy, and everything short of God disappoints us.

So change your point of view. Life is not a mockery. Do not become cynical. Become prayerful. Perfect happiness is not here. Life has it's "little bit of heaven right here on earth" moments, but by and large, **you were made by God and you were made for God, nothing short of God will ever satisfy you.**

So blessed are you who hunger and thirst for holiness; for someday, someday, you shall be satisfied with All Saints in the heavenly kingdom.