

January is the time when leaders of church and government annually address the people they lead giving us insight into themselves and their values and priorities as well as setting out their vision for the future.

Jesus in today’s well-known Gospel scene likewise gives a vision of himself, of us as his disciples, and insight into the life of the Kingdom of God he has come to establish.

Jesus, as portrayed by St. Matthew for the Jewish Christian readers to whom he wrote his gospel is the “new Moses”—the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise, leading God’s people from the exile of sin to the promised land of forgiveness and freedom, the Kingdom of God. To this end, Matthew divides his gospel account of the life, teaching and work of Jesus into five sections, corresponding to the first five books of the Bible, known as the Torah, traditionally ascribed to Moses. Just as Moses gave the Ten Commandments to the Hebrew people on Mount Sinai, so Jesus, the new Moses gives his new law setting forth the attitudes and lifestyle of those called to the Kingdom of God. While we popularly think of the “Sermon on the Mount” as consisting only of the Beatitudes we’ve just heard, it actually comprises all of chapters five, six and seven of St. Matthew’s gospel which we will hear over the upcoming weeks until the start of Lent.

The familiar Beatitudes as their title implies, represent the “attitudes”, the fundamental outlook and corresponding action that Jesus says distinguishes his followers from those whose attitudes and actions are dictated by worldly standards. They are the key to what Jesus will further develop in the rest of chapters five, six, and seven that follow.

Jesus’ vision, and the mark of the vision of his true followers, is one in which divine blessing and happiness is found in a personal, church and corporate life marked by being **poor in spirit** (humbly recognizing our creatureliness; that all that we have and are come from God as gift to us and not the result of our own power, or by right as the prophet Zephaniah in the first reading, St. Paul in our epistle, and other Scripture references in

relation to a spirituality and practice of Christian stewardship remind us); **mourning loss** (standing in solidarity with all who are powerless, those pushed to and forced to exist at the margins of life, the peripheries, as Pope Francis continually reminds us); **the meek** (those who, though strong, choose not to push their weight around but use their strength to serve the weakest); **seekers of justice** (not legal justice as such, but a justice that recognizes and works for the dignity and equality of every person at every stage of life as a child of God); **being merciful** (having and acting with a heart of compassion as Pope Francis describes, as a person and a church that is a “field hospital”, binding up the wounded); **clean of heart** (rejecting duplicity, acting with transparency, clear intention—what you see is what you get); being a **peacemaker** (choosing to forgo revenge, not building walls to separate or keep out others but speaking and acting in the words of Saint Pope John XXIII, “Whenever I see a wall dividing people, I try to knock out a few stones”); a willingness to **suffer persecution and insults for the sake of God** (choosing not to “write off” another person, group or community, instead responding with forgiveness and patient forbearance in the model of the God who never abandons us and is willing to take us back despite our repeated betrayals.)

In order to achieve the vision of Jesus means that, like Jesus, we must let go of our **ego**, our preoccupation with myself, my vision. A good way to look at this is to take the term **ego**, as an acronym. **EGO is: EDGING GOD OUT.** Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount gives the prescription to cure our diseased ego to experiencing true blessedness, true happiness in this life and eternally: following his own words and example of self-emptying love for God and every person. As presented by Jesus, the Beatitudes turn upside down the way the world sees and acts in terms of relationships to God and people and invites us to a new world order that is the presence of God’s “kingdom of heaven.”

Having listened to Jesus’ inaugural address, once again we are invited to translate his vision, his words, his example into action by our response.

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