

Over these past few nights in our Holy Week services we have been reflecting on the Beatitudes, that collection of simple affirmations and promises that come at the beginning of Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Each one is introduced by the simple 'Blessed are ...'

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,

"Blessed are those who mourn,

"Blessed are the meek,

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

"Blessed are the merciful,

"Blessed are the pure in heart,

"Blessed are the peacemakers,

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

As I was reflecting earlier in the week, these words are so familiar, their very familiarity can rob them of their force. Also the very process of translation from the original, the choice of word used to convey the meaning of the original can take some of the edge off it.

Blessed – it has become a very 'churchy' expression – not the sort of word you would hear in the bar in the yacht club or the rugby club. The word in the original Greek in which this passage was written, that we render as 'blessed' carries the meaning of happy, joyful.

Happy are the poor in spirit

Joyful are those who mourn

Happy, joyful are the meek

It takes the churchiness, the solemnity out of it. But in its place I find a promise of a sense of peace, of contentment in being at one with the Christ

who utters these words. That in recognising our poverty in spirit, that we come to God empty handed, we recognise our dependence upon him and get a glimpse of the reality of grace, and discover that he meets our deepest needs of love, of forgiveness, of hope.

Blessed, happy, joyful are the meek. The meek, not the weak or the pliable, but those who, rather than standing on the own dignity, insisting on their own importance, adopt the mind, the manner of Christ. The one, who being their Lord and Master, knelt at the feet of his disciples and washed their feet, who lay aside his majesty and took the nature of a servant and was obedient unto death, even death on a cross – in the process we are promised a peace that no status in this world can confer.

The way of the Beatitudes is the way of laying aside, of letting go, of service of God and one another. It is to follow him who taught his disciples to turn the other cheek, to go the second mile, to forgive those who wrong us not seven times but seventy times seven. It is the way of the cross. Jesus said to his followers:

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?

Those who save their life will lose it, those who lose their life will find it. It is in this finding and losing and losing and finding that we find our true peace and joy with Christ. So today, in fellowship with Christians all around the world, of different traditions, different nationalities and cultures, in Dublin, in Africa,

Asia, Europe, America, in the city of Jerusalem we stop, we look, we watch,
we pray, we dedicate ourselves afresh.

- 1 When my love for Christ grows weak,
when for deeper faith I seek,
then in thought I go to thee,
Garden of Gethsemane.
- 2 There I walk amid the shades,
while the lingering twilight fades,
see that suffering, friendless one,
weeping, praying there alone.
- 3 When my love for man grows weak,
when for stronger faith I seek,
Hill of Calvary, I go
to thy scenes of fear and woe:-
- 3 there behold his agony,
suffered on the bitter tree:
see his anguish, see his faith,
Love triumphant still in death.
- 4 Then to life I turn again,
learning all the worth of pain,
learning all the might that lies
in a full self-sacrifice;
- 5 and I praise with firmer faith
Christ, who vanquished pain and death;
and to Christ enthroned above
raise my song of selfless love.

Jesu, Jesu I thee adore
help me love thee more and more.