

Ordinary Time 7A 2017

Living the Sermon

For the past several weeks we have been listening to the Sermon on the Mount. These challenging words fascinate us because they present us with such a clear statement of the kind of life we ought to live as Jesus' disciples. Although we may wonder if Jesus' teaching is realistic, the great St. Augustine once said that this sermon is "the perfect measure of the Christian life." St. Augustine meant that the Sermon on the Mount is the "norm" by which we ought to *measure* our faithfulness to Jesus. To the extent we live according to this sermon, we are faithful followers of Jesus. To the extent we do not, we fail in our call as disciples.

Three weeks ago we heard the Beatitudes, which describe the blessings of the kingdom as well as how we ought to live within the kingdom. Two weeks ago Jesus called us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And last week he taught us the importance of fulfilling the deepest meaning of God's law by going beyond the letter of the law to the spirit or inner meaning of this law. For example, the commandment says: "Thou shalt not kill." But Jesus says we are to avoid the angry and demeaning word that leads to murder. The commandment says: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But Jesus says we are to avoid the lustful thought and desire that leads to adultery.

But today we come to the most difficult part of the sermon, the place where we stumble and ask if we can truly fulfill these words. Jesus teaches us that we should not retaliate, that we should love even our enemies. This, of course, is difficult to do. When someone harms us, our first inclination is to respond in kind: to return tit for tat, evil for evil. But Jesus instructs us to turn the other cheek and not to respond in kind. He goes further. While we are accustomed to loving those who love us and doing what is good to those who are good to us, Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. When we act in this way, he teaches us, we will be acting like God who is merciful to all.

But how can we live in this way? How can we fulfill the demands of this sermon? By ourselves we cannot! If we try to fulfill the words of the sermon by our own power, we will fail! *We can only live the sermon as a community of believers!* I need your help to live this sermon, and you need my help to live this sermon. We need each other to fulfill the ideal of the sermon. We need the support of a community of believers that lives a sacramental life. This is why we gather as a community to celebrate Mass and receive the Eucharist week after week.

We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The world says we cannot live this way. The world says we should retaliate when others harm us. The world says we should hate our enemies. But we say that we can live in a better way because we are the community of Jesus Christ. We are a community empowered

by God's Spirit, and this Spirit enables us to live in a new and better way. That is why we can and must fulfill the Sermon the Mount with joy and gratitude.