



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Fr. Paul Kidner  
Homily for the 4th Sunday, Year A  
ABBEY 9 a.m.  
2/3/08

As we prepare to celebrate this Mass on this last Ordinary Sunday before Lent begins, let us turn to the Lord acknowledging our sinfulness and ask for his mercy and forgiveness.

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The Church sets before us today the Beatitudes that Christ taught in his Sermon on the Mount. Are they ideals that only the most heroic should strive for, or are they principles that should govern the life of every Christian? They sound pretty demanding for the average person. Are the promises attached to each of the eight intended as special blessings for those who would excel in following Christ, or are they a description of a heaven which is the intended destiny of all of us?

St. Augustine, back in the year 393 as a newly ordained priest, made a lengthy study of the sermon on the Mount as the basis of his preaching. He realized that God is calling all of us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect and he sees the Beatitudes as an eight fold path toward perfection that all of us are called to walk, and the end of that path is the joy of eternal life with God, a joy which God wants all of us to share.

For St. Augustine the eight Beatitudes are sequenced steps along that path, each of them an aid to reaching our goal, not a seemingly impossible challenge. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This starting point teaches us how to live in this world even if we cannot undertake the counsel to the rich young man about selling all one's goods and giving them to the poor. Poverty in spirit enables us to see the things at our disposal in this world as a means to heaven and not see them as our heaven on earth. A similar lesson is taught in today's Old Testament reading from the prophet Zephaniah: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have observed his law." When the Israelites had been deprived of their property and many deported to Babylon, the Lord comforts "a remnant, a people humble and lowly who will take refuge in the name of the Lord." They are being taught to place their trust in God,



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not in material possessions. St. Augustine works his way through the beatitudes as if climbing the steps of a ladder rising upwards. "Blessed are the sorrowing ... blessed are they who hunger and thirst for holiness ... blessed are the merciful ... blessed are the peacemakers."

Augustine relates the Beatitudes to the directives of the Our Father in the prayer which the Lord himself taught us as the way to pray for the specific graces that we need to rise toward him. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom.' And in the Our Father, "Thy kingdom come." 'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.' "Give us this day our daily bread. 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' And in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us as we forgive others."

The Beatitudes are not intended as an impossible challenge towards a goal which is unattainable for the average Christian. They are guide posts towards a destiny which is promised to all of us. +