

## 2020- 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY

Moses climbed to the summit of Mt Sinai to be alone with God and to pray. It was there that he was given the Ten Commandments. He, in turn, gave them to the People of Israel.

In St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is presented to us as the New Moses. Like Moses, Jesus went up to the top of a mountain to pray and to be in communion with God. During this time of intense prayer Jesus was inspired by the Father to compose the New Law which we now call 'the Beatitudes'.

In giving the New Law to those who gathered at His feet, Jesus was not in competition with Moses. The Beatitudes complement the Ten Commandments and bring them to their fullest meaning.

If I ever was given the opportunity to visit Israel again, the place that I would go to before all others is the Mount of Beatitudes. It is now 28 years since I visited there. On the Mount of Beatitudes, beyond all places in Israel, I felt Jesus' presence very, very strongly.

By New Zealand standards the Mount of Beatitudes is not large. While it is reasonably steep, it takes only about 40 minutes to climb.

The mountain is covered in lush grass; liberally sprinkled with red and gold wild flowers. To one side is the deep blue of the Lake of Galilee stretching across to the Golan Heights. On the other side, the Mountain overlooks fertile countryside: wheat fields, banana plantations, olive groves and all types of citrus orchards.

And on the summit is a tiny chapel with large windows opening out in all directions. It is a place of glorious light.

The gentle spirit of the Mountain of Beatitudes is in wondrous harmony with the peaceful spirit of Jesus' message. There is no thunder, lightning or darkness here as there was on Mt Sinai when Moses received the 10 Commandments; just peace, beauty and light. While the 10 Commandments demand that we avoid evil; the Beatitudes demand that we do good.

It was here that Jesus taught: "How happy are the poor in spirit." The poor in spirit are those seek to do God's will in all things. God is the centre- the beating heart- of such people's lives. Misfortunes do not stress the poor in heart for they know that God is in control of everything and that God will give them the strength to cope with whatever may afflict them.

“How happy are the gentle.” A woman who recently suffered the tragic death of her daughter told me that during her days of mourning, an elderly, semi-crippled neighbour was continually looking out of her kitchen window noting people arriving. She would cook delicious meals sufficient for all the visitors and quietly bring them over to her. The gentle are those who are sensitive to the needs of others and don't hesitate to pitch in and help.

“How happy are you who mourn.” Later Jesus would say: “If you would be my disciple, you must take up your Cross and follow Me.” Following Jesus involves sharing His Cross; sharing in His work of bringing down evil. The way of Jesus means persevering in goodness during times of intense darkness and temptation.

“How happy are you who hunger and thirst for what is right.” When people are exploited, when power is abused, when systems dehumanize people, a Christian must cry out in protest. To be silent in the face of sin is to allow sin to take ever-deeper root. To act against injustice is to open ourselves to retribution and hatred. There will be times when we must do this.

“How happy are the merciful.” A lady wrote to me last week telling about the hurt done to her spirit by her daughter during a Christmas stay. She was sworn at, belittled and mocked. She never wants her daughter or her equally obnoxious Grandchildren to visit her again. Jesus' message to this lady is crystal clear: forgive, forgive and keep on forgiving. To carry poisonous hatred in our hearts is to curdle our spirits. With God's grace, the lady must forgive her semi-crazy daughter unconditionally and forever.

“How happy are the pure in heart.” Let us take control of our TV sets and immediately turn off anything which glorifies adultery or belittles family life; anything which is blasphemous; anything which revels in violence or drug-taking. Let it be an iron cast rule to never use our computers to view pornography and never to use text mail to send hateful messages.

“How happy are peacemakers.” We must turn away from all vicious talk, from all gossip mongering. The person we are belittling has been made by God and is loved dearly by God. We are to be people of peace.

Such is the New Law Jesus taught on the Mount of Beatitudes. It is the purest distillation of God's wisdom. To enshrine it as our way of living is a sure guarantee of happiness in this life and will bring us to eternal joy in the life to come.

