

Along the track

Sermon on the Mount

Jesus' mission was not to make us angels or superhuman. True, we are all called to holiness, wholeness. As Jesus put it, I have come so that you may have life to the full. He gave us an indication of what that might look like at various times, not the least of them in what we have come to know as The Sermon on the Mount. Life to the full isn't just about life after death but in the here and now. It is not about health, fitness and diet, however important they may be. It is also about finding happiness, purpose, direction, something or someone to commit to.

Many writers over many years have offered other versions or translations of the sermon in an effort to explore more deeply its meaning and relevance. I found this translation of the Sermon on the Mount years ago, but I can't remember where!

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a hill and sat down. His followers came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

- *How fortunate are those who know they have great spiritual needs, who recognise their need for God. This trust in God will bring them help, hope and strength.*
- *How fortunate are those who are desperately sorry for those who suffer. The joy God gives them can never be taken away.*
- *How fortunate are those who want to do right more than anything else, they will find complete fulfilment.*
- *How fortunate is the person who tries to understand the other's mind and heart, to walk in their shoes and is ready to forgive. They will also receive forgiveness.*
- *How fortunate is the person whose motives are always honest and straightforward, for that person shall be able to see God.*
- *How fortunate are those who have a passion for justice and who work to bring peace and reconciliation among people, for they are doing the work of God.*
- *How fortunate are those who are treated badly for doing good, for doing the right thing. God will remain always close to them.*

Why fortunate? Because that doesn't come about easily. It can be very difficult to admit that we need help, that we need others, that we can be too quick to judge another's motives, that forgiveness is not always easy, even forgiving ourselves. We are

fortunate when we realise that working for justice and fairness is not someone else's problem but mine too. Life to the full has much to do with how we interact with others and what we do about that. The Beatitudes do not teach us to put up with what happens now and it will be fixed up in heaven, rather to seek holiness in the here and now, in the experiences of daily life, in those we meet and greet, in how we work for a better world. In doing that we grow, we become more fulfilled, more able to grasp the meaning and purpose of our lives. Finding that is not just a matter of *what* you do and how you do it but also *why* you do it .

Perhaps a succinct summary of all that comes from Pope Francis who has asked on a number of occasions that we work:

- to see the image of God in ourselves and every person;
- and because of that, to cultivate our capacity to act justly, to be merciful, to make peace and to create a fair and just community;
- to be inclusive communities where diversity is affirmed and where excluded persons are welcomed and find their dignity recognised.

We are asked to give life to those beliefs, so that they don't just lie around on a page or on a nice poster or document but to give them life in this day, at this time, in this place. It can be very helpful to ask:

- From your experience, how and where are these beliefs given life in your home, your parish, your school?
- Can you think of an example of one notable way in which one of these beliefs is acted out in your family, your local church, your school?
- Would you say there is an atmosphere in those communities to help members to see, hear, touch and feel God's love for them? That doesn't come about just by saying prayers.

We can't choose every aspect of our lives. For all of us, there are challenges to overcome. It is what we bring to those challenges that makes the difference. In the words of Pope Francis: Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment.

Regards
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