

Be like Jesus

Father John Beiers

Epiphany 5 – Healing Sunday

I delight in this parish. It is full of love, expressed and also unexpressed. While some of the blessings here are easily seen, there are many which are quietly hidden, and we do not know about them unless we ask. Thus the Op Shop is quietly arranged, the toilets are cleaned, and urgent financial needs of some of our brothers and sisters are met. Some actions of love and mercy, we will never know – but they all happen because people love Jesus and want to serve Him.

Sometimes football stars stay behind after a win, and help to clean up the grounds; others prepare the field for a game, but no-one ever sees them do it. The latter may not be motivated by Christian love –but they do it from a grateful heart. Look at Peter's mother after she was healed. She has new life, she wants to give, she wants to serve; just try and stop her.

While we do all these things from a grateful heart, there is no doubt that we still fall short of being like Jesus, in some parts of life. Of course, I am leading up to Lent, and what we will do to detect where some few changes probably need to be made.

Let's look at the fourth Beatitude, the fourth "Blessed" from the Sermon on the Mount, from Matthew's Gospel , chapter 5, verse 6. It says "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled". Someone has said that this could be re-written as "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for ME.'

If we look at a hymn/song we sang recently "I want to walk as a Child of the light", the essence is found in some of the following words: –

I want to walk as child of the light.
I want to follow Jesus.
The star of my life is Jesus.
I want to look at Jesus.
Show me the Way to the Father.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

This may seem to be baby talk, but if we really look at the words, it is all about...Jesus. The composer, Kathleen Thomerson, has an ardent desire to be enfolded in the love of Jesus. Her heart's desire is to be Jesus in her life. She has a passionate yearning for Christ-likeness.

If our heart's desire is to be like Jesus, that desire will eventually be granted. Meanwhile, we have this beatitude's promise of blissful happiness as a "by-product" of our desire. Our lives may be full of sin and failure, but our longing will bring happiness. Although God is full of mercy, it is the opposite for human beings. Mercy and forgiveness do not seem to come naturally to us. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we tend to want to "get our own back, and to seek revenge, or, at least what we might describe to ourselves as justice, reparation, compensation or asserting our rights. That is why it is so important to measure ourselves against this beatitude as a test of the reality of our Christian faith.

Mercy is part of the righteousness that the fourth beatitude tells us should be our fervent desire. A naturally forgiving spirit is rare, so, if we find that we do now have a forgiving spirit, we can rejoice at this work of God in us.. If we are kind to our adversaries in their distress, it is a sign that "I no longer live, but (that) Christ lives in me". (Galatians 2:20)

My discipline this coming Lent is going to be a little different. I am going to compare my spiritual and actual life against all of the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5, one by one, and be honest with myself about how things actually are.

Some of my complaints are so trivial, I am ashamed of myself. For example, there are often complaints about the hymns that we do not like. Do you know how difficult it is to please everybody? It is impossible. The only way would be to pick a hymn like "The Church's One Foundation, which everybody (I hope) likes, and sing it four times on a Sunday, every Sunday of the year, perhaps alternating with O Come All Ye Faithful on some occasions.

However, some dislikes are a matter of real concern. In Normanton, on the Gulf of Carpentaria, our church of St. Peter had his symbol painted on the noticeboard by the gate. These symbols are an upside down cross, with golden keys behind it. Some new, very serious Christians had come along, and were concerned that the upside down cross was, according to them, the sign of the devil, and could I get rid of it. I explained that the cross indicated that Peter was crucified upside down, and the key were the keys of the kingdom, given symbolically to Peter by Our Lord. Also that these symbols existed together long before the so-called devil's symbol existed. Their concern was still so great that it was a threat to their faith, so I had the sign taken down, and repainted without the cross. This was according to Jesus' direction to do nothing that imperils the faith of a weaker believer.

So then, if you know of something that needs changing in me, please tell me. I will not get angry... I will just bite your head off! Seriously, I need to prepare for meeting Jesus' face to face, and that may be sooner than later.

All blessings to you this Lent. Amen