

01/29/17 4A

-- Everybody loves a winner, or so we are told. That seems to be part and parcel of our culture. We think blessings come to those who win in life, whether in business, sports, politics, or even in religious circles.

-- Oh, we may feel for those who have it tough; we may even help them. But we don't seem to think of them as blessed. But Jesus turns our cultural ideas on their head with this passage we call the Beatitudes.

-- Whom does Jesus call blessed? He talks about the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, those who mourn or are persecuted for doing what is right. He exalts the clean of heart, those who thirst for justice and peacemakers.

-- Sure, we give out a Nobel Peace Prize yearly. On occasion we praise someone who works for justice. But each of us tends to have our own definition of justice. One person's idea of justice is another's idea of revenge, much like one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

-- For the most part, though, we think that blessings come to the successful, in whatever field of endeavor. Nobody wants to brag about being #2, let alone #222.

-- If Jesus were speaking to us in 2017, he might say, *Blessed are those who are refugees from their homeland... Blessed are Christians persecuted in Iraq and Muslims persecuted in Myanmar... Blessed are those who persevere in negotiations when everyone says it's hopeless.*

-- Yes, Jesus has a quite different standard of blessedness than most of us, most of the time. Jesus was more interested in transforming people and society than settling down comfortably in it. And look where that led him: to the Cross.

-- St. Paul addressed a Corinthian community which was, for the most part, not in the successful part of that city's society. But he told them that God has chosen the lowly and despised.

-- Their problem was that too many of them were working so hard to become successful that they would walk over one another in the process. They forgot where they came from and which Messiah they followed.

-- We can easily fall into that same temptation. We can too easily look at the Church as a club where we feel comfortable with each other, doing occasional good deeds. We don't see it as a somewhat dangerous place which strives to transform the world through Jesus Christ.

-- That temptation is strong for me personally, because I like to feel comfortable. But I must remind myself that the Church is not a refuge for the comfortable. It is a place where the afflicted are comforted and the comfortable are afflicted.

-- Back in the early 1960's MLK wrote *If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity...and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club.*

-- That is just as true today as when he wrote those words over 50 years ago. We must not fall to the temptation to measure our success in terms of the world's standards.

-- Jesus gave us quite different standards. We find them here in our gospel. We must give them more than lip service. We must live them out in how we work and manage our families, in how we manage our Churches ministries and budgets, and in our work to influence the priorities in our local, state and national governments.

-- For God's true wisdom was given to us through his son Jesus Christ. He taught us what we should value. More importantly, he lived it, no matter what the consequences. May we strive to walk in his way.