

Feb. 4-5, 2017

Thoughts from the pastor,

This Monday I will be heading out of town for a week. I will get back late next Sunday night, 2/12. I will be going on a long walk in Mississippi and taking a friend of mine with me. Fr. Mike Malloy and I have traveled down many a river together, usually in a canoe. This time will be a little more leisurely because Fr. Mike has had several problems with his heart in the last sixteen months. I will have my cell phone with me for emergencies. Once again, my goal is to catch up on my reading and walking.

This weekend Fr. Mario and I will be doing the Blessing of Throats through the intercession of St. Blaise. Fr. Cleary will probably be giving the blessing but it would be in Plainview for he is subbing out there this weekend. I don't know if St. Blaise will do more for us this year because the Pope made the person from our Archdiocese who has his name a Cardinal. I haven't asked Cardinal Blaise Cupich, who is in charge of the Archdiocese of Chicago, if he has gotten any word. He is probably too busy to worry about it. But Saints don't have that worry. They work on a different level so stay for the blessing after the Mass you attend this weekend. I am always amazed how many people have to rush out of Mass before the priest leaves, unless of course they can stay for a blessing like this. In my mind that is weird thinking. But then I try to give the Lord more and not try to see how little I can give and still get into heaven.

I hope you have been meditating on the Sermon on the Mount. These three chapters of the Gospel of Matthew (5-7) are a very important piece of Jesus' teaching. Last week's portion of it was the Beatitudes. These face us with the reality that Jesus wants us to get over ourselves and recognize what is going on with those around us, especially those whose lives are a mess at the moment. We must be poor in spirit, so we don't look down our noses at people. Then when we mourn, we will notice those who mourn around us; to give them comfort.

We must be meek. By the way, the word meek in this context does not mean timid. It means to be ready to do what the master asks of us. When we break or tame a horse or another animal, we make it submissive to the master. If you look up meekness on Wikipedia you will find it comes from the Greek, and can refer to a horse that has been tamed and bridled. But this can refer to a war horse which is very powerful and definitely not timid. But to be of any use it has to do what the rider wants.

We have to hunger and thirst for righteousness. That is not something you can do on your own. You have to work for it with others. We have to be merciful. God is the judge of people's souls. We must know how to understand what is right and wrong but we cannot judge the person. But merciful means nothing unless you are trying to help the person. We must also be clean of heart which means we cannot try to side with the sinner by sinning like them. We must try to draw them away from sin. Jesus showed us just how thankless that job is. He also showed us how to do it in different ways depending on the situation.

We must be peacemakers. This is another one that you can't do while you hide from people. Jesus' example in this was to be loved by different people and thus draw them toward each other. The apostles were a perfect example of this. Most of those guys should have hated each other but they loved Jesus so they learned to deal with each other.

If you do all of those you will come to understand what the last one is all about, for you will be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. This is different than the current cultural idea of wanting everyone to like us. If we are doing what we are supposed to be doing we might have as many people hate us as if we were horrible sinners. But the ones that will hate us will be those who want to hold onto their sins. I would guess that this is how some people end up in hell. God wants to show them mercy but they don't want to hear it. They want their sins.

That was last week's portion of the Sermon on the Mount. This week we hear how we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If you have the challenge of the Beatitudes in mind it is easy to understand where Jesus is coming from with these notions. This was one of the reasons I wanted you to study the whole thing. When we hear it in bits and pieces it can sound tame. It is not tame. Think of some of the people who could be referred to as the salt of the earth or the light of the world. I have just been doing some studying of Saint Padre Pio. He certainly fits the bill. But then that is what a Saint is. They stand out as examples of goodness. They do not just follow the crowd. Jesus is describing those who live the Beatitudes when he says people are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He is not referring to everyone who hears this message, for many ignore what God wants of them.

It is just like when God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Many of the Israelites died in the desert because they did not obey those basic commandments. But God is expecting much more of us if we want to go further than the land of milk and honey, Israel. He wants us to prepare for entering the New Jerusalem and join in on the Royal Banquet of the Lamb. Much more preparation will be needed.

Next week you will hear just how different the Ten Commandments are compared to what Jesus is asking of us. He does an actual comparison of a couple of them. In our current culture, which seems to condone so much sex and violence, we should be very afraid as we read this part. This gets me back to what I mentioned last week. If you read and reflect on these chapters you will understand why St. Paul says: "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Letter to the Philippians 2:12)

By the way, when I get back next Sunday night, it will not be for long. The next day, 2/13, I will be joining Fr. Mario and Fr. Cleary to go to the clergy conference in Schuyler at the Benedictine Retreat Center. We will leave Monday morning and get back the next day, Tuesday, 2/14, late in the afternoon.

God bless you,
Fr. Frank