

Matthew 5:1-12

According to scientists, a Buddhist monk by the name of Matthieu Ricard is the world's happiest person. When I read this news headline last week, I was intrigued. How do they measure happiness? If I had a vote, I'd say that a warm, well-fed baby wearing a clean diaper is the happiest person on earth. For one thing, the baby has no idea that there is an election this coming Tuesday. The baby is unaware that there is an economic crisis, that there are people called terrorists, and that the Cardinals lost in the playoffs. Yep, the baby gets my vote as the world's happiest person...until he becomes hungry that is. But that's just it! Happiness is a fleeting thing.

Some Bible interpretations substitute the word, "happy" for "blessed" in our text. "*Happy are the poor in spirit...*" is how they put it. "*Happy are those who mourn...*" and so forth. But the way "happy" is used in conversation today, such an interpretation fails to convey what Jesus is teaching here. You, dear Christian, are blessed even when you are not happy. How you feel at any given moment does not change your status before God. It's like marriage. An unhappy marriage is still a marriage. Even when a husband and wife are unhappy with each other, they are still married to each other. And so also in your marriage with Christ as His bride, the church. He calls you blessed not because of how you feel, not because you have a positive attitude. You can have the worst day of your life and you are still blessed because you are baptized into Christ, you are married to Him, you are His precious saint.

When you hear the word, "saint," do you think of a group of happy people? They are now. "*They are before the throne of God with palm branches in their hands, and God has wiped every tear from their eyes.*" But these are the ones who "*came out of the great tribulation.*" Their life here on earth was not a happy one. Listen to what Hebrews 11 says about these saints: "*(Some) were tortured...others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated...wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.*" This does not sound like a happy existence, but it is a blessed one. God's saints are blessed even when they are persecuted, even when life is unfair. As Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who mourn...Blessed are you when others revile you...and utter all kinds of evil against you on My account.*"

There is no beatitude that begins with the words, "Blessed are those who are happy..." or "Blessed are you when your man wins on Election Day..." or "Blessed are you when you have a good job and good health..." It's not those who are rich who are blessed, but those who are poor--"*poor in spirit.*"

Now this is an interesting word. The word, "poor" in Greek is the same word used for "beggar." So what Jesus is saying here is "Blessed are the *beggars before God*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Did you ever see a bunch of happy beggars? Rarely do beggars look happy. They approach people with a sad, dejected face in the hopes of receiving money. What if, however, a beggar knew for a fact that each and every time he put his hand out he would receive even more than what he was expecting? He would be a happy beggar, a blessed beggar. This is you. This is how it is for God's saints, for those who are poor in spirit, who are beggars before God.

You confessed with me this morning, "*I, a poor, miserable sinner confess unto You all my sins and iniquities...and I pray (that) for the sake of Jesus...You would be gracious and merciful to me...*" We're beggars. We come before God poor and destitute. We have nothing to offer Him. Instead, we come as people who have sinned terribly against Him. Beggars do not earn what they receive. That's

why they beg. If we got what we earned, we'd perish in hell forever. But we don't just confess our sins. We confess them to God. We are beggars before God. And therefore we are beggars who are blessed because God gives even more than we are expecting. He forgives your sins and gives you eternal life in heaven.

The average person thinks that a saint is someone who lives a better life than most people. Not true. A saint is nothing but a beggar before God. God's saints are in heaven rejoicing not because they are relishing in the reward they received for being good people here on earth. God's saints rejoice in heaven because God has had mercy on them. They know they are there only because of Jesus. It has nothing to do with how they behaved here on earth. To live like a saint, therefore, does not mean to live in such a way that others see how good you are. To live like a saint means to live before God always begging for mercy.

And that is what we do throughout our Divine Service. We begin by begging God to forgive us in the Confession of Sins. In the Kyrie we repeat the words, "*Lord, have mercy.*" In the Gloria we sing, "*Have mercy on us, Jesus.*" In the Offertory we beg God to create a clean heart within us. In the Agnus Dei we cry for mercy. In the Lord's Supper we come forward as beggars. And with the Benediction we say, "*Amen*" to God's promise to be gracious to us. From start to finish in the Divine Service we approach God as poor, sinful beggars. No wonder so many people have little use for church. It goes against our nature to beg. We're self-sufficient people, we like to think. And when we come to church we're beggars...nothing but poor beggars.

But you, dear beggar, are something more. You are holy beggars, for God does give what you beg for. For Jesus' sake who died for you, He forgives you all your sins and declares you to be holy in Christ Jesus. You are blessed beggars, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Heaven is not given to good people. Heaven is given to you, to God's forgiven beggars in Christ. You are precious beggars. God never turns away from you. When your life takes a turn for the worse, when problems mount up, when sadness comes, God has not left you. You are precious to Him. You are His beloved saint. He does not promise you a happy life here, but He does give you a life that is blessed. And He does point you to the life to come...a life that will never end, a life without sorrow and tears, without death and mourning, a life where your joy will be full and your happiness will overflow.

Happy or sad, therefore, wealthy or not, sick or healthy, you are God's blessed saints in Christ Jesus. You are His beggars. He gives you even more than you expect right now, and the best--the best is yet to come. Amen.