

What nonsense!

In today's gospel, Matthew reports the guidance Jesus gave to his disciples and the crowds who followed him up the mountain, just as Moses gave the Chosen People the Decalogue – the Ten Commandments – when he climbed the mountain. In the beginning of what we call “The Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus gives us a set of guidelines for happiness that go hand-in-glove with the Ten Commandments.

Non-believers might respond to these guidelines with **“WHAT NONSENSE!”**

But we Christians call them “The Beatitudes.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: “The Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity. They express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection; they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations; they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ's disciples ...”

And it continues: “The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude. This vocation is addressed to each [one] personally, but also to the Church as a whole, the new people made up of those who have accepted the promise and live it in faith.”

Those who were catechized prior to Vatican II will remember this one:

“God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him [...] and so to come to paradise.”

The *Catechism* says “Beatitude makes us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ and of eternal life. With beatitude, man enters into the glory of Christ and into the joy of the Trinitarian life.”

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* says that beatitude is “a state of utmost bliss.”

This bliss ... this beatitude ... is a free gift from God. We only have to accept it.

When I am teaching, I have often referred to these guidelines as the ... “**BE**-attitudes” ... because they give us the way Jesus wants us to act ... the way we are supposed to act ... the way we are supposed to be ... those attitudes that we are supposed to have ... a roadmap to and of the Kingdom of God.

But many of these beatitudes ... these **BE**-attitudes ... seem – on first glance – to be largely nonsense!

Could the atheists be right?

Our own observation of the world is that it is not the poor or the meek who are at the top running things ... but rather the rich and the powerful ... and – for the most part – they got there ruthlessly ... perhaps through no-holds-barred politics which not only hurt their opponents but also hurt the people they claim to serve ... or – in many parts of the world – through murder, war, intimidation, torture and corruption.

Hungry? Thirsty? In mourning? Put upon by others?

Exactly how is that supposed to be blessed?

Be merciful and others will be merciful to you?

News must have been censored back then because from what I read and hear today that doesn't seem to be happening either!

But Jesus is not talking about the world as it is appears to us now ... or even as it appeared in His own earthly lifetime.

He is not discussing earthly wealth but, rather, having a need for God's help to get us through life.

So many people will haughtily proclaim that they don't need God in their lives ... that they can – and do – succeed without Him ... and “Isn't life wonderful without having to follow those silly and inconvenient Christian rules made up to scare and control the masses?”

But should a calamity befall them ... should a disaster strike ... they are most likely to be the first ones to shout:

“WHERE WAS GOD?!?!?!?”

And how will God comfort **US** when **WE** are mourning?

Has that ever been a happy experience?

The mourning Jesus is talking about is not the grief over the loss of a loved one ... but rather the sadness for the sake of our sin and all the sin in the world. In Psalm 119, it says “My eyes shed streams of tears because your teaching is not followed.”

We mourn because God's will is not being followed.

And we mourn for all the senseless murders in our cities, country and world, not the least of which are the millions of innocent children who have been ... and continue to be ... slaughtered in their mother's wombs.

We are blessed for our meekness, gentleness and compassion as God comforts us because we have seen the world as it should be. We are blessed when we hunger and thirst for what is right ... not what is expedient or “politically correct” in the popular culture.

We are blessed when we are merciful ... when we forgive even when the crime is horrific and we want to cry out for vengeance and retribution.

Remember that Christ Himself asked forgiveness for those who were crucifying Him ... torturing him to death on the cross.

We are blessed when we are pure in heart. Not that we are sinless, but because we live our lives according to our beliefs ... not what is permissible – or even encouraged – by our secular society.

We are blessed when we seek peace when peace may be the last thing on our minds and in our hearts. We may feel that our enemies don't deserve peace ... and, perhaps, by our reckoning, they don't ... but if we don't offer it to them we certainly won't have it for ourselves!

The last two can be taken together.

We're blessed when we stand up for our Christian faith even in the face of ridicule and persecution.

Here in the U.S., we are very fortunate. We may have to suffer ridicule from those who distrust and hate us because of our Catholic Christian faith, but many followers of Christ around the world do physically suffer at the hands of others ... daily ... sometimes even resisting oppressors and torturers to the point of death.

But these martyrs are certainly blessed for these fellow Christians now share Christ's glory in Heaven with all the rest of the saints.

What do we say to those who say this unwillingness to abandon our faith is nonsense ... as they walk away from the torturers with free passes and smirks on their faces?

We can certainly remind them of 17th century philosopher Blaise Pascal, who in his defense of Christianity, *Pensées* (or "Thoughts"), made what we call "Pascal's Wager."

This "wager" can be summarized as follows:

"Even though the existence of God cannot be proven through reason or the 'scientific method,' a person should act as though God exists ... because by living life accordingly one has everything to gain, and nothing to lose."

The corollary, of course, is that if you fail to live your life as if God exists ... and you are wrong ... you have **EVERYTHING** to lose"!!!

Therefore, to those who urge us not to believe ... not to follow God's rules
... well ... I can only say:

WHAT NONSENSE!!!

END

Based on Matt 5:1-12a