

Title: Christ Calls Us to Use More Than a Hammer and Nails

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we give you thanks and praise for making us saints; may we be inspired by the lives of exceptional people, giving us the courage to do our part in bringing about your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Did you know that Batman lives in Michigan? Mark Williams was arrested when he was found leaning off of a hardware store building, wearing a batman costume. Maybe he was a hammer and nails kind a guy. As part of a plea deal, Williams copped to attempted resisting of an officer, a misdemeanor. More serious charges, including a felony weapons possession count, were dropped by prosecutors.

Now when we think of saints, the Michigan Batman may not be included. But I want to tell you about another person. Her name is Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu. She was born in 1910 in what was then the Ottoman Empire and what is now Macedonia. Her father owned a hardware business and was one of the wealthiest people in town. He died when Agnes was nine years old. Then her mother raised her in the Roman Catholic Church.

As a girl, Agnes was fascinated with the lives of missionaries. So, she decided that she wanted to be one too. At the age of 18, she went to Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto as a missionary. She never saw her home town, her mother, or her sister ever again. After she learned English, she was sent to India. She took her vows in 1931 and took the name of Teresa. She taught in a school in Calcutta until she appointed headmistress in 1944.

In 1946, Sister Teresa heard a “call with in a call.” She was to leave the convent and help the poor of Calcutta. In 1949, a group of young women joined her in her work. She had to beg for food and supplies.

On October 7, 1950, the Vatican gave her permission to start a congregation that later was named the Missionaries of Charity. The mission was to care

for “the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers,” and all who are shunned by everyone.



Mother Teresa started with an order of 13 in Calcutta. Today the order has more than 4,000 nuns running orphanages, AIDS hospices, while caring for refugees, the blind, the disabled, the aged, alcoholics, the poor and homeless, and victims of floods, epidemics, and famine.

Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. In her later life, Mother Teresa suffered from many ailments. In 1997, she resigned as head of her order and died six months later. India gave her a state funeral.

To list Mother Teresa's accomplishments would take a good deal of time here this morning. She was recognized as a saint long before she died. She will soon be on the Roman Catholic calendar. Our accomplishments may pale in comparison to Mother Teresa, but *we* are also saints. Today is our day.

I am guessing that the beatitudes were picked to be read this day because they exemplify what it is to be a saint. We saints build God's kingdom by: being poor in spirit, confessing our sins, being meek, focused on rightness, being merciful, being Christ-like, making peace, and suffering persecution.

We don't know where the Sermon on the Mount took place. Since only Matthew mentions it there is doubt about its literal setting and it may be a literary device by Matthew. Matthew often compares Jesus to Moses. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus giving the law to his followers, just as Moses did on Sinai. There is a large hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee that is identified as the site for this sermon. There is a church and monastery on the hill. The garden is gorgeous.

Jesus teaches his disciples. Of course, that is why this is called The Sermon on the Mount. It's a long sermon. I doubt anyone took notes. It may have taken days. The beatitudes seem to reflect Isaiah 61 – just saying.

Jesus begins with what we call the Beatitudes. This is because each statement begins with the English word, blessed. A more literal translation for blessed would be “happy.” I think it may be safely assumed that the situations that Jesus refers to are well known by his hearers. Jesus doesn't use parables here. Jesus does not elaborate. Each beatitude is in two parts. The first part states a condition that the disciples are familiar with in this life. Jesus then tacks on a short piece of good news. The purpose of the beatitudes is to point people where they should be. We are to do these things, now.

Let's look at each beatitude. The first one blesses the poor in spirit. At first glance this seems an odd thing to bless. The Greek word translated as poor literally means being economically challenged. Wealth and privilege entail great spiritual peril. Accumulating money makes money the object of one's desire. It may then be tempting to push God aside. So, the poor in spirit are blessed. They understand their utter dependence on God. These will be rewarded with the kingdom of heaven. They accept Jesus' reign. Matthew repeats this theme elsewhere in his gospel.

Those who grieve are blessed. When both John the Baptist and Jesus said that the kingdom was near, they didn't expect jubilation. They expected tears. This is a realization of how we have failed to make the kingdom a reality. When we confess our shortcomings, we will be comforted.

The Greek word for meek here is the same word used to describe the Virgin Mary, meek and mild. I won't even get started on Jewish mother and son issues. But, could Jesus be thinking about his mother here? Impossible to tell. Just as today, society in Jesus' time exalted aggressive, harsh, and tyrannical people. Meek people were disgusting individuals. Here, Jesus elevates the disgusting to the rulers of the world. Those who are not meek will get the boot.

What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? I don't know – I'm asking. We can assume that what Matthew means by “righteousness” is spoken to the disciples as individuals rather than being heard in a collective sense. The literal meaning of the word means doing right by or for God. So we have a sense of godly, right actions done by disciples (us) and having an unquenchable need to achieve this righteousness. If we do this, we will be satisfied, like after eating a Thanksgiving meal.

If we are merciful, we will receive mercy. This can be called karma or as paying it forward. Mercy includes forgiveness and compassion for the poor. If we are merciful, God will show us mercy. It also helps to be meek.

Jesus next blesses the pure in heart. I mean, who is *really* pure in heart? It may be that this means that if we are committed to the kingdom and its righteousness, we will be inwardly pure. Being committed to the kingdom is to be one with Christ. When we are in this kind of state, we will see God.

Jesus next blesses those who make peace. Not necessarily the peaceful. This requires one to be active. Universal peace will bring God's kingdom to earth. Those who help peace happen are children of God. This is global reconciliation. This is global forgiveness.

But the world is more interested in keeping its hates and prejudices instead of peacemaking. The world wants to persecute those who are different or those who disagree. Seeking God's righteousness is hazardous duty. Those who are persecuted get the same reward as the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven.

The final beatitude is really an extension of the previous one. The previous beatitude is applied to the disciples. Jesus calls insults and slander persecution. Only this persecution is because of Jesus. So, what do we do when we are persecuted? We rejoice! Why? Because our reward is great in heaven *and* we are in the same company as the prophets.

Our allegiance is to the suffering Christ. It should not be surprising that we are called to suffer. There is nothing that can be done to us in this life that won't be rewarded in the next. And we have the satisfaction of doing our part to bring about the kingdom here on earth.

Mother Teresa was a beatitude kind a woman. As hard as it seems to make the beatitudes a part of our lives, Mother Teresa did it. But very few of us are called to be like Mother Teresa. If there were many, she probably would not have been unique enough to receive the Nobel Prize for peace. But God gives us gifts to bring about the kingdom. God also gives us exceptional people to model ministry for us.

We are here, because we are part of Jesus' entourage. The Sisters of Charity are another part of Jesus' entourage. There is probably not a Mother Teresa here, but we are saints nonetheless. We saints build God's kingdom by: being poor in spirit, confessing our sins, being meek, focused on rightness, being merciful, being Christ-like, making peace, and suffering persecution.

Text: **Matthew 5:1–12** (NRSV)

**5** When Jesus<sup>a</sup> saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:  
<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.  
<sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
<sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely<sup>b</sup> on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. <sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>a</sup> Gk *he*

<sup>b</sup> Other ancient authorities lack *falsely*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 5:1–12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.