

“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

People want to be happy. We assume that happiness is having the hope and promise of everything in life being wonderful, free from the problems, worries, pains and fears that we often experience in life. The pursuit of happiness is enshrined as an inalienable right in the US Declaration of Independence. And people do spend most of their lives pursuing happiness. An old article in *Parade* magazine noted how citizens of various countries hold different ideas on happiness. The ideas may be dated and may have changed, but at the time the Austrians said health is the most important precondition for happiness. The Finns said it's kindness. The Greeks opted for honesty. The Dutch said beauty in women and handsomeness in men make for happiness. The British claim a sense of humour is the indispensable requisite. The Italians, Japanese, and Americans agree that money is no guarantee of happiness—but it sure helps.

The whole idea of happiness is something that seems near and dear to the hearts of many people. The readings for this Lord's Day remind us that our happiness is a gift from God. The Old Testament reading reminds us of God's constant provision for his people despite their attitude or deeds. The Epistle shares the simple truth that the ways of the world are not always God's ways. He chooses weakness and ways that seem powerless and foolish to accomplish His mission, yet He achieves His mission. We have a real reason for happiness, for we know that we are saved by grace—by His gift—without any merit or worthiness in us. God's gift of happiness is not the same as the happiness people seek in this world.

Our text today comes from the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We know the verses before us as the Beatitudes. These statements of blessing identify the faithful and ascribe certain virtues to them. Over the years translators have dealt differently with the Greek word *makarios*, and no one translation seems absolute. Attempts have included blessed, happy, lucky, and fortunate. Most of the paraphrased translations, in their effort to make the bible sound contemporary, tend to centre on that word, “happy”.

Everyone wants to be happy. In 2025 the top five happiest nations of the world were Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Israel. Canada ranked 15th on the list. When polls and surveys ask people to rate their happiness, it is hard to know just how objective the results can truly be. The experiences around us tend to suggest something different. True happiness seems to elude most people. What is even worse is the many destructive ways in which people seek happiness, chasing after happiness in ways that are bound to produce misery, pain and disappointment. Some think that happiness can be found in a bottle of booze or in a promiscuous lifestyle. Some think that happiness comes from having anything and everything you want. Some think happiness is found in fame, in power, in wealth. And yet this kind of happiness so quickly comes up short. That is because it is not true happiness.

Our loving Lord makes a major contrast today between worldly happiness and the truly blessed life. When social scientists and psychologists look for the secret to happiness, we can say we already know the secret. It is found here, in the Beatitudes. These wonderful promises of our God assure His faithful people of more than just a happy life—it is a blessed life, a life of perfect joy and happiness, given to us by the grace of God Himself.

An old Sunday School song reminds us: “Happiness is the Lord”. But we might think the exact opposite when we first read our text. Listen again to those who Jesus says are blessed: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. He says: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom*

of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." Now that don't sound like a description of real happiness. If Jesus had said that we were blessed when we were healthy, wealthy and wise, that might seem more logical. But persecution, insults, mourning? Where is the happiness in all this?

We find it hard to be happy if things are not exactly what we want or expect them to be. But what Jesus tells us is that truly blessed people are the ones who are set free from the root cause of all unhappiness, and that is sin itself. The devil has this wonderful knack of always offering what appears to be happiness to people. Please yourself, do things your own way, have fun and you will be happy, he says. He lures us into things that move us away from God, and which help us satisfy our own desires. And then, just when it seems that maybe we will enjoy a little bit of happiness, he slams the door, trapping us in our own folly and suddenly turning happiness into wretchedness. Just ask the drug addict or the alcoholic—they'll tell you how true it is. Ask the man who has spent his whole life chasing after wealth and power at the expense of his family and friends. He can tell you that is how the devil works. Ask the adulterer, or the thief, or even the gossip. They can all tell you how things that make you happy one minute can turn against you the next.

What Jesus tells us in our text is that worldly happiness is a poor substitute for divine blessings. The blessed person is the one who is set free from the sin that brings unhappiness. Jesus says: *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, those who realize that they can never make themselves happy, that their lives are empty without God, *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn*, who know the pain that sin causes in their lives and in the world, and who long for relief, *for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek*, not the boastful and self-righteous, but the humble *for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*, wanting the good that only God can give, *for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

In a very real sense, Jesus is saying to us: I am the secret of happiness, but also so much more! You will not find lasting happiness in the world or the things of the world. This sinful world only brings pain, fear, and death. But I have come to bring happiness. I have come to bless you beyond all measure. I bless you by taking away the sin of your life. I died for you on a cross, and even better, I rose from the dead to give you life. As you trust in Me, living in the freedom I give you and letting me give you help and strength, I will turn even the saddest days, the most difficult days into joy and celebration. I will give you a happiness that the devil can never take away. In fact, you will be more than just happy, you will be blessed.

What Jesus is telling us is that happiness does not come from avoiding our problems, or doing whatever it takes to entertain ourselves or make ourselves feel good for a time. It comes from being forgiven by God. It comes from having the hope of life with God. It comes from being a baptized child of God. Now this doesn't automatically mean that everything is perfect. We still have the aches and pains, the problems that we must deal with. Consider Karen, who knows the cares of this world. First, her husband lost his telecom job. She became pregnant, eager to start a family, but then miscarried. A month later, her closest cousin was diagnosed with breast cancer. She went to visit her cousin, only to return to her Florida home when 2 hurricanes smacked into her hometown. Then one of her best friends died at the age of 50 from a brain tumour. If Karen's happiness were determined only by circumstances, she would have every reason to be miserable. But Karen is a devout Christian. She says: "We're putting our lives in God's hands and trusting He has our best interest at heart. I've clung to my faith more than ever this year. As a consequence, I haven't lost my joy."

We learn so quickly that worldly happiness is not enough. But divine blessedness comes as we let go of our lives to leave them in the hands of God, who forgives us the sin that makes us unhappy. It comes through the Saviour who destroys sin's power, including its power to bring misery into our life. Happiness—no, blessedness—comes through the Lord who gives us His assurance that He can turn the darkest day into a time for celebration. In a sense, the secret of our blessed life is like baking a chocolate cake. First, you start with some flour, which in and of itself is rather dry and unappetizing. Next you add a cup of sour milk - but the batter still doesn't look very tasty. Then, to make matters worse, you put in a raw egg. But when you add the sugar and chocolate, then bake it in the oven, it comes out tasty and inviting. God does the same thing with our lives. Often in life we encounter 'dry stretches' which are tasteless and uninviting like the flour. We also meet with 'sour' experiences like the milk, and even a few 'raw deals' like the egg; but when they are left with the master baker, who adds the sweetness of forgiveness and the flavour of life that only He can give, He can bake them into something sweet and flavourful that makes us more than happy—it makes us feel blessed! And through His grace, we have that blessed life not only in this world, but

indeed, for all eternity, as we enjoy the fulness of His blessings forever. Amen.