

Peacemakers

In God's Providence, the Feast of All Saints and the election coincide this year. We are reminded to act like the saints during an election fraught with division. In a year marked by a pandemic, protests, natural disasters, and a toxic election, the Beatitudes urge us to hunger for justice. They challenge us to be humble and merciful peacemakers. The Beatitudes show us a different way to live in society.

The Beatitudes are the Way of Christ. They depict the attitude within Jesus' heart and the actions of his daily life. He was poor in spirit, meek, and merciful. He hungered for justice. If you live by the Beatitudes, then you will live everything else that he teaches. The saints lived the Beatitudes.

I will reflect on only one beatitude today, but I encourage you to be intentional about living all of them, especially this week. Even in trials, you will be filled with God's blessings. You will walk in the happiness that comes from God alone. That is what the word 'beatitude' means, to be filled with the happiness and blessings of God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt. 5:9). One thing that we all need right now is peace. We long for peace personally and collectively. The sick feel miserable and anxious. Medical personnel are weary and worn. The elderly and those with compromised immunity are isolated. First responders are overworked and underappreciated. Civic leaders and county health officials have been attacked verbally or even threatened with physical harm. We long for peace personally and collectively as a society.

What did Jesus have in mind when he said, ***"Blessed are the peacemakers . . ."***? Being a peacemaker is not a passive attitude of simply refraining from violence. Rather, a peacemaker works hard for the well-being of others. Jesus tirelessly served the sick and the suffering and he restored peace in their lives. After healing the woman who suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years, he told her ***"Go in peace"*** (Lk. 8:48). When he forgave the sinful woman who washed his feet with her tears, he said, ***"Go in peace"*** (Lk. 7:50).

Jesus was a peacemaker by healing the sick and forgiving sinners. He restored people to physical, spiritual, and communal wholeness. In both cases, the women were reconciled with their local community. Physical and spiritual healing included being reintegrated into the community. Think of how lepers were forced to live outside of town because people feared contracting leprosy from them. The same is true today. The sick are often isolated. How can we be peacemakers for the sick and elderly?

Recently, I was contacted by an isolated elderly couple. The husband struggles with the ongoing effects of cancer, and his lack of immunity makes him highly susceptible to COVID-19. He sent me a photo of a man and his two young sons shoveling their sidewalk and pathways in their backyard for the dog to run. It lifted their spirits. They knew that they were not alone and loved by others. Peacemaking is simpler than we might think. A 'peacemaker' is someone who reaches out to others who are struggling.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Children act like their parents. Peacemakers are children of God because they act like God.

The Beatitudes are found at the beginning of chapter 5 in Matthew’s gospel. At the end of the chapter, Jesus described another way to be children of God. He said, ***“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust”*** (Mt. 5:44-45). God’s goodness is as impartial as sunshine and rain. Our heavenly Father makes his sun rise on the bad and the good. Peacemakers act like their heavenly Father. Those who love enemies and pray for persecutors are peacemakers, so they are children of God.

I find it tough to pray for those who write to me and spew out anger, or for those who declare that I have lost my way as a bishop, and therefore, they can totally disregard my leadership. But Jesus says that real love means to pray for those who strike out at you, so I pray for them. It is not easy or pleasant, but it feels right. We are going to need a strong dose of praying for enemies after the election.

Finally, to be a peacemaker, you have to understand the Hebrew word for peace. Shalom means total well-being. It includes physical, emotional, and spiritual wholeness. Shalom means that a person has good health, plenty to eat, good relationships with others and a tranquil life, most of all they are secure in God’s love. They know that God is with them.

I wonder whether the people who are so outspoken about the election actually get involved as peacemakers during the four years prior to the election. How much do they promote the well-being of others the rest of the time? To be a peacemaker is to work tirelessly for the well-being of others.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Rejoice and Be Glad*, Pope Francis described the broad scope of life issues for which a peacemaker struggles tirelessly. He wrote: “Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection” (*Rejoice and Be Glad*, 101).

Catholics who are peacemakers defend the lives of the unborn and the children separated from their families. They defend the parents of those children who fled because their lives were at risk in their home countries, and they reach out with mercy to women who are considering abortion. Peacemakers defend the elderly threatened by euthanasia, victims of human trafficking and asylum seekers, the poor, destitute, abandoned, and underprivileged. To be a peacemaker is to work tirelessly for the well-being of all people.

These are the criteria we should use to choose candidates for political office. More importantly, these are the ways that we should invest our energy. Rather than ranting at election time about a particular candidate, we need to work daily at being peacemakers. I

am not aware of anyone who was declared a saint because he or she was famous for ranting at election time. But there are myriads of saints who worked tirelessly as peacemakers. ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”***

Despite our failure to live the Beatitudes, the Lord feeds us with his peace in the Eucharist. Approach the altar like the poor in spirit who humbly depend on God for the grace to live the Beatitudes. The only way to sainthood is to receive the peace flowing from the cross and resurrection of Christ, and to bring that peace to the world.

As you receive the life of Christ graciously poured out in the Eucharist, ask God to make you hunger and thirst for justice and to be merciful as your Father is merciful like the saints who have gone before us.