



The Beatitudes revisited: a template of the good life

From Where I Stand NCR September 9, 2021

I once heard a story that used to make me laugh.

"Computers are so powerful that pretty soon the country will be run by one computer, one man, and a dog," the teller says. "Really?" says the hearer. "How's that work?" "Well," the teller says, "The man is there to feed the dog." And the hearer says, "Great, but why's the dog there?" And the teller says, "The dog's there to make sure the man doesn't touch the computer."

Now the laughs at the improbability of nonhuman dominance over human rationality are dying out.

Who would have thought? In one lifetime — yours and mine — the world we were told to expect to live in has totally disappeared.

We live from screen to screen now. Our children "talk" to one another on their smartphones sitting across the room from each other instead of across fences. Our cars run on electricity, which means that gas and oil have suddenly become a liability rather than a miracle. Robots are about to become our closest companions.

Our last president — the "keeper" of our Constitution and our democracy — tried to engineer a coup that would destroy both completely.

The majority leader of the Senate, in a poor imitation of a president, has **taken upon himself the power**([link is external](#)) to control the membership of the Supreme Court by refusing to advance nominees for the **advise and consent**([link is external](#)) process of the Senate. So, the Senate, accustomed suddenly to being part of an adult Boy Scout troop, rather than a college of individual consciences, has deadlocked itself in petty partisanship to the scoutmaster and so is paralyzing the advancement of the whole nation.

At the same time, one party is out to win elections by making it cumbersome, if not egregiously difficult, **for people to vote**([link is external](#)). And to upend it all, a woman — a Black woman, by the way — stands in line to automatically ascend to the presidency if anything happens to President Joe Biden. Which, in a racist/sexist world, come to think about it, may be exactly what keeps Biden in place for the whole term whatever his support and even by those already calling for his removal.

The point now, is that life is no more a process that we think through and work out one step at a time. It is "virtual" now, seemingly real, but not really. Instead, it lunges from error to error — from alternative facts to **the Big Lie**([link is external](#)) — with no one, apparently, capable, or maybe even interested in, stopping the runaway train.

While about 20% of the country refuses to be vaccinated or take the precautions that would save their neighbors — no matter how immune they themselves feel about it — the citizenship of citizenship disappears.

And yet, as seriously wrong as these things may be, there is also an eternal reason for hope. After all, the dimensions of public power describe only our institutions. Not our people. Not our hearts. Not our souls.

In the end, it will all depend on what we as people, as citizens, as individuals do — and really want to be — that will enable us to survive all this. Most important of all, we have a life model that does not need computers, depend on robots, or turn our lives over to digital mystery to count our votes. There is still something more important than all of that and it is the heart we take to politics, to the economy, to immigration, to the public figures we seek to lead us, elected or not.

In Scripture, we find the Beatitudes, the signs of what it means to be a good human being, an ethical government, a moral country.

The renewal of the United States depends, Jesus' declaration of the Beatitudes implies, on us, on our own integration of these values in life — regardless of the system we see being bent out of shape or the toxic individualism that is poisoning it.

My suggestion is that we look again at a piece of what the world may too easily dismiss as poetic piety but which is of the essence of personal development, the backbone of communal goodness, and a seedbed for the re-emergence of "the common good" in the 21st century.

This model is of the essence of the Jewish scriptures and articulated as a lodestar of human development in the Christian scriptures. Scholars call it the Sermon on the Mount. I call it a template of the good life that transcends all differences of race, creed, or cultural commonplaces.

It is a constitution for the creation of human community. It is a call to a common good, a common goal, and a common blueprint for both personal relations and national character.

Clearly, we are not arrived there yet. In fact, until we say that this is precisely where, as a people, we hope to be and want to go, there is little hope either for national unity in this pluralistic population of ours and even less hope for human unity in a world of historically competitive tribes.

It is, I think, in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount in which, despite the confusions of this complex world, lies a charter of universally human behavior.

This country created a charter based on the inalienable rights embedded in creation that became the standard and model for equality everywhere.

Now we must draw a template of human relationships from the will of that same God who wishes all of humanity "well and not woe."

Now we must find a way for equal but different peoples to live together on this globe in a world more united and, at the same time, more disparate than ever before in history.

From where I stand, as the chaos in Afghanistan rages and the gridlock in American politics rants and raves across our congressional aisles, the call of the Beatitudes is to humility, to mercy, to integrity, to compassion, to justice, to peacemaking and to courage. **As Albert Camus wrote after World War II(link is external)**, "In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me, there lay, an invincible summer." The Beatitudes are my invincible summer of human development.

But here's the problem: What do all those things look like at a time like this? Is it possible? Is it really something we can hope for now?



Blessed are the meek — saving the tradition

From Where I Stand NCR September 30, 2021

I discovered over the years that one of the major soul-searing questions to be dealt with in spiritual development is the friction between tradition and traditionalism. I spent years trying to figure out which was which and why there was a problem.

In the end, it was a Sufi story that broke open the differences between the two for me.

According to the Sufi story, a pilgrim on his way to the mosque for the feast day, slumped to the ground exhausted. The sun had been hot, the path had been rough and uneven. "I must stop for a while," he told himself, and settled down on the side of the road just in sight of the mosque and within earshot of the muezzin.

He was hardly asleep before he felt himself being shaken roughly awake. "Sufi, get up," the man said. The voice was not kind. The hand was not gentle.

"Some Sufi you are," the stranger went on. "You're a disgrace." He paced and flailed his hands. "How dare you lie down at the time for prayer with your head turned to the West," he shouted, "and your feet pointed toward God in the holy shrine."

The old Sufi stirred a bit and opened one eye. "I thank you, sir, for your concern," he said. Then, a grin playing at the corner of his mouth, he went on, "so would you be so kind as to turn my feet in some direction where they are not pointing at God."

Now I understood the problem. The Sufi knew that tradition and traditionalism are not the same thing. Tradition is the celebration of the core beliefs of the faith — the keeping of the feast day. Traditionalism, on the other hand, idolizes practices that repeat the old ways of celebrating our beliefs. Praying while turning his head to the West rather than to the East, for instance, and not pointing his feet away from the mosque were common practices. But those customs were far less essential to the Sufi's faith than celebrating the feast itself. It was not these customs to which the Koran had testified.

Clearly, tradition — the great insights and beliefs of the faith — energizes an institution; traditionalism — substituting personal practices for the established truths of the spiritual life — can easily choke the life out of it.

Why? Because on the creed hangs answers to the spiritual essence of life, to what we must do to live it to the full, to what's really essential to it and what's not. For instance: priesthood is our tradition; clericalism is an accretion of traditionalism.

Jesus left us a set of values — not a set of ritual behaviors or ancient prayer forms or scheduled feast days. For us, then, to maintain the tradition means to live the Beatitudes that Jesus himself taught us that are at least as needed on the globe now as they were then, in the villages of Palestine.

It is tradition that requires us to answer the question, "What does it mean to be holy as Jesus was holy in the here and now?" The answer to that question is what we call the Beatitudes.

In a world of warring tribes and ever larger bombs and the displacement of thousands of people as their once-homelands burn behind them, Christians must surely consider what the beatitude "blessed are the meek" implies about the way you and I live now. How could something like that possibly have real meaning for us in this day and age?

I'll tell you.

As I began to write this second reflection on the value of the Beatitudes to an age like ours, the television anchor of the moment informed me that American officials were meeting with the leadership of the Taliban to negotiate the process of ending the U.S. presence there.

The question, after 20 years of war, enmity, distrust, and fear of the future, is what will all the "negotiations" come to? And the answer is that in the end, such crucial "negotiations" depend on whether the beatitude "blessed are the meek" is defined as weak or as "respectful."

If past concerns give way to the present mission of both sides, the negotiations can become the beginning of a new kind of peace for both groups.

On the other hand, if invective and taunts, mockery and demeaning nicknames, intimidation and domination, bullying and disrespect are the tenor of our talks, our relationships, our business deals — now a commonplace of American political culture — then nothing changes except the

silencing of guns. The deepening of our conversations is aborted. The mutuality of our agreements is suspect. Fear takes over and dashes the coming of hope.

The problem is that as a world, even as a people, we have learned to doubt that the cultivation of the God of peace in our homes, in our love lives, in our communities and political parties, in our governments and our world is possible anymore. We have girded our speech for war everywhere.

Leaders at our highest levels refuse to negotiate, have failed to respect others, reject cooperation, fail the republic and consciously set out to divide this country. Worst of all, it has poisoned our cities, split our families, and poisoned our civic structure. We crawl into our dark caves and call out insults at old friends, long-lost loved ones and our siblings. And, of course, at those who are "not like us" who are breaching our borders to find themselves unwelcome, whatever their needs. So, separation is a ploy of survival now while our hearts die within us on every level from personal struggles to the edges of isolation.

Knowing that so-called "rules for war" have shriveled in our time, that the whole notion of a "just war" is ridiculous in a world where noncombatants are called collateral damage, the meek come determined to arrive at a decision that enables both sides of the issue to leave the discussion with dignity, without embarrassment or humiliation. Our continued mouthing of "the rules of war," of the days of "honor and justice," as if we were still committed to them need serious review. Those hallmarks of humanity have all been exhausted.

Recognition of basic humanity have all disappeared in a nuclear world that puts force and torture where decency and dignity must be if we are ever to be great again. Worst of all, this new irrationality has permeated the hallowed centers of private life. It has tainted the language of children. It has made social life, neighboring contacts, "the American way of life" loud, loaded with imprecations, impossible.

Instead, the meek — the humble — are soft and serious listeners. They negotiate, they don't enforce. They listen for the concerns of the other; they quietly and calmly present their own. Then, they hope to seal the hopes of both.

The humble see their counterparts as good as they themselves aspire to be. They see them as worthy to be heard, as well. And they themselves are neither wimps nor cowards. When they say "yes" they mean yes. When they say "no" they allow no the space it needs to grow into an advantage for both. They are not intractable or impertinent. They are above and beyond both adult childishness and insane warmongering. They really believe in negotiation.

Most of all, the meek — the humble — those who know their gifts and talents and plans but respect the gifts and talents and plans of the other as well — "possess the land." They seek to bring us all together again, to make welcome everywhere a mark of the nation, whatever the differences of civic or ethnic opinions, of political policies or regional realities.

From where I stand, force — not reason, not justice, not equality — has, at least to this point, won the day. The only hope we have to preserve, to reclaim, what we have always known ourselves to be is exactly what Jesus was trying to teach us when he said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land."

Clearly the Beatitudes are all we have left to make humanity humane. As the Hindu Swami Sivananda, like Jesus, **has been quoted as saying**[\(link is external\)](#), "Humility is not cowardice. Meekness is not weakness. Humility and meekness are indeed spiritual powers."

Clearly, raw power and personal force are not working: Maybe next time we should try "blessed are the meek." It is, after all, our tradition.



The choice between happiness and reward: Blessed are the poor in spirit

From Where I Stand NCR October 21, 2021

Different? Yes, it was different. Booths and tents and vendors lined both sides of the commons. The voices of presenters from one stage after another wafted out into the crowds, tangled and demanding, women as well as men, lay as well as clerical.

It was one of the foremost spiritual conferences I'd ever attended. In fact, I admit, I was as intent on experiencing the event itself as I was interested in having a conversation on my own ideas. One voice captivated me almost immediately.

The speaker on stage at the largest of the meeting tents was [Bishop Elias Chacour](#)([link is external](#)), an Arab-Israeli Melkite Greek Catholic whose life had been spent promoting peace between Arabs and Jews. Like Jesus, an Aramaic speaker, Chacour was presenting to contemporary Christians the Jewish-Semitic-Aramaic interpretations of the Beatitudes.

As he went into detail, I stood in front of the tent transfixed. After all, my Western Christian education on the Beatitudes was clear but, it seemed, maybe not totally correct. Where I came from, the basic understanding of living out the Beatitudes Jesus taught went like this: Blessed are those who (do something) for they will receive (something.)

It was a give and take proposition, a quid pro quo, do this and you will get that. Transactional, they say today. You will be "blessed." Only we said "bless-ed." Meaning, "holy." Holy are you and you will be rewarded for that.

But this speaker of the language that Jesus spoke, too, taught a different translation. "Blessed," Chacour said, meant "happy" are you. "Happy."

Clearly the Beatitudes were not about an exchange system in heaven. They were about what happens when we live one way rather than the ways of the world around us. These teachings were about what brought contentment — a sense of enoughness, of sufficiency, to a person's life even in the face of the great ambitions, desires, power, status, wealth or success that were the coins of the realm of my world now. They were happy who were humble, meek and satisfied with enoughness rather than surfeit, we were being told. Happy were those who knew what it meant to be "poor of spirit" rather than intent on pretending to be more than they really were.

It was a light out of darkness for me. It was hope and expectation where a sense of endless burden had been instead. I was trying to be what I never did manage to achieve rather than accept the poverty of my spirit, my endless desire, my appetite, my passion, my greed for what wasn't worth it to begin with.

It opened another whole way of looking at other people in the light of my own spiritual needs and spiritual failures.

The monastics of the desert tell the story of brothers who were trying to determine a proper penance for one of them who had failed in his monastic duties. But when they assembled to review the situation, Abba Moses, the most revered of the eremitical community, was not there. So they sent for him to confirm their decision and approve of the penance saying, "Come, everybody is waiting for you." So he took a worn-out basket with holes, filled it with sand, and carried it along. The people who came to meet him said, "What is this, father?" **And the old man said(link is external)**, "My sins are running out behind me and still I do not see them. And today I have come to judge the sins of someone else." When they heard this, they said nothing to the brother and pardoned him.

Abba Moses knew clearly what he was — imperfect, but honest about it; gentle to the rest of the world because he knew his own limits; wholly in need of God's help, not anyone's paragon of virtue; aware that God's love would suffice for his own weaknesses. The lesson is a universal one: Indeed, blessed are those who realize their own limits, weaknesses, need for support, and dependence on God. Emptied of themselves they see the goodness in others. They are able to speak the truth in humility. They realize their own powerlessness and God's greatness and the basic goodness of the world around them.

The insights in the powerful little statement were profound. And so, those who know themselves are "happy," contented, not exercised, not dismissive of others, able to learn from everyone.

But here we are in our own time: Claiming our "rights" rather than struggling to care for the needs — the very lives — of those around us.

The opposite of poverty of spirit is obvious: Pride, the overarching disdain of others, is the disease of independence. It is the narcissism that exiles us from ourselves. It's this that makes it

impossible for us to learn, to grow, to create community, to be part of the human family. It's this that creates the false criteria that slivers life into colors and sexes, into money and poverty, into power and economic slavery, into "our kind of people" and "those people."

This kind of pride, of narcissism, is not about human development. It's about the infectious disease of self-centeredness. Like chemicals used to destroy weeds, it takes the flowers down with it, too. It destroys everything in its way.

And worse, this kind of pride is a virus so transmittable that we not only stand to have it ourselves but to infect others with it as well.

We lose any sense of purpose beyond ourselves. Immigrants come carrying infants on their backs. They are walking out of the creeping drought brought on by nations that farmed and mined these native resources for themselves. But on television, instead of welcome, we call them "**rapists, murderers, bad people**([link is external](#))" — all designed to forgive our own sins by labeling theirs.

From where I stand, we lose a sense of commitment to anything beyond what services our own concerns. We want "law and order" here, we say, but not equality of the races or voting sites everywhere.

Instead of grasping the present moment, instead of understanding that so much of our present problems we have created for ourselves by refusing to face the imminent danger that comes with overheating the planet, overusing fossil fuels, overreaching in our desire for security, and overlooking the effects on the globe. And so, we live with crushed spirits, in a state of depression we do not even recognize in ourselves while the truly "poor in spirit" have no grandiose evaluations of themselves and so are happy to be part of the co-creating God gave us to do.

Without humility, **John Buchan says**([link is external](#)), there can be no humanity. No care for the other. No acceptance of the self. No identity with the human community. No hope for breaking out of the greed and grasp of the present era that allows for massive tax breaks for one kind of people and the housing evictions of families and children of others.

Without such poverty of spirit, such simplicity of desire, such contentment with enoughness, there can be no awareness of the riches that come with simply being alive, of being loved and so, loving earth and all in return.

The fact is that we are being confronted with a major choice now. We can live in a way that makes us happy with what we have. Or we can go on looking for the "rewards" of a superfluity we cannot have but think we deserve — whatever happens to everybody else in the world, to the world itself — and to us, as well, in the long run.



Blessed are those who mourn now — and do something to make it better

From Where I Stand NCR November 11, 2021

There's a tendency to wince when people begin to reach back into the deep, dark past to prove a present point. As in, "Grandma always said" or "We're going through the same things Germany did before WWII" or "Jesus taught in the Beatitudes that we need to ... whatever." After all, all these things are light years away from what we're dealing with now.

Really?

The truth is that attitudes are different than facts. What Grandma said is a fact; what Germany went through is a fact. What Jesus taught us to develop are the attitudes tried and true that it takes to deal well with the facts. The Scriptures call them "beatitudes" meaning attitudes that bring "happiness" or "fortunate attitudes."

Clearly, the Beatitudes shape us as people. They bring us to emotional maturity. They build the kind of self-restraint in us that makes any situation able to be handled.

To be "meek," [the first beatitude we considered\(link is external\)](#), calls for quiet, calm, humility and being willing to listen to what's going on around us in periods of chaos or confusion. That kind of restraint is a way to deescalate a situation that is already on the brink of overreaction. It brings sense into a situation before it's too late to say, "I'm sorry," or save a long-time relationship, or make friends, or even resolve some deep-seated differences.

To be "poor of spirit," [on the other hand\(link is external\)](#), is to be contented with the basics of life — to make "enoughness" rather than excessiveness — our goal. After all, how many coats can we wear at once? How many cars can we drive at one time? How many times can we exhaust ourselves in body and soul, straining to get more and more and more of what we don't really need, can't use and, too often, won't do a thing to move the needle of our happiness scale much more than it is now? In fact, it may well do to have even less. As the Kenyans say, "Those who have cattle have care." Wealth is its own problem, don't forget.

And yet, today's beatitude is different than those. Very different. Troubling, in fact.

[The third beatitude\(link is external\)](#) is "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." Or to put it in street language, "Happy are those who can see what's on the verge of being lost — like democracy or civility or equity or justice or equality or the unity in united — and so do something to save it or at least make it better."

But how? The fact is that the greatest part of our present discomfort may well lie in the fact that we are living in a morass of present problems that never seem to go away. And we are surrounded by them.

The cities [are crumbling\(link is external\)](#). Prices are [getting higher\(link is external\)](#) but wages are stalled. The house is like a tomb now that kids have left home and we're feeling isolated. The globe is on the brink — or in the midst — of war everywhere. Women are [still underpaid\(link is external\)](#). Children are exploited. Misinformation [is rampant\(link is external\)](#). The very health of the environment is under assault.

It all adds up: Whatever happened to peace and quiet, friends and neighbors, democratic values and a sense of progress, a sense of contentment and security?

Yet, unless we allow ourselves to face, to mourn, what is happening to our lives, to our country, to our church, we are going to be left with little worth living for ourselves. Who is going to bring some engrained faith and guidance through the grief if not ourselves?

How can we not mourn what we [know about Facebook now\(link is external\)](#), for instance? How can we ever trust it again? How can we sort out the ideas that are true and the ideas manipulated to create tension, polarization and political chaos? How can we not call for change?

How can we not mourn when one political party [blocks legislation\(link is external\)](#) that will be good for the whole country for the purpose of making the other party's president look weak and ineffectual?

How can we not mourn when, in the face of the possible loss of the planet, we [watch politicians whittle down legislation\(link is external\)](#) that could retool, reeducate, renew the whole economy so that the engines of the past — gas and oil — can win them the congressional seats they're

seeking as lifelong benefices. How can we ignore the kind of politics that is willing to surrender the whole world to the losses that come with climate change in the name of money?

And all the while, we sit in the crosshairs of climate change while petty politics play their self-centered little games and our children face the deluge?

No problem is too big to solve if we are resolved to solve it.

From where I stand, the Beatitudes are clear: What we ourselves do will be what will "comfort" our mourning. Once people stand up together and refuse to vote for the kind of "public servants" who obstruct the future while they watch the present being destroyed, the enemies within will disappear.

When "throw the rascals out" becomes the mantra of the mourners in the face of "Make America Greedy Again," we will have begun to begin again. When mourning our situation, grieving our losses, we refuse to accept the ongoing decline, the country will rise again. Together.

Then the next generation, the one now watching the fires and the floods, watching the senseless "War of Congressional Houses Without a Conscience" doing nothing to stop the fires and the floods, may realize that their parents' generation never said a thing about it. Then, when they get that figured out, they may have the sense to destroy the barrels of oil and the ashes of fossil fuels their fathers worshipped as they ate the country up.

It's not only beatitude time, it is confession time, repentance time, beginning-again time.

Otherwise, we shall all mourn. But by then it will be way too late to profit from the wisdom of the past, too late to be comforted ourselves.

Blessed are they who mourn. Now. Before it's too late to change. For they shall be happy.

If they do it.



Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness —for they shall boil over

From Where I Stand NCR 12/2/2021

If ever there were a time in American history in which a beatitude calling us to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" would seem unduly important, this must certainly be it.

Not because the country is in any kind of unusual or intense military conflict. Not because climate change is threatening our immediate survival as a nation. Not because global economic collapse is upon us. Not because we're facing a new surge of COVID-19 and a new international variant, omicron, in the unmasked faces of a looming winter. Not even because our voting rights are now endangered or the results of our last presidential election have been admitted to be true, publicly or not. (After all, we all know the truth of it — Republicans and Democrats alike.)

All of those things are real, of course.

But worse than the impending doom that comes with the regular cycles of stress and strain with which countries must deal, lie three other problems that Jesus, looking out over the tiny little Jewish stretch of the Roman Empire, couldn't help responding to.

First, the area was caught in the grips of a rogue government. Rome, the empire, was living off the booty of small countries too weak to resist them.

Second, the local poor and outcasts were being ignored.

And third, these satellite peoples faced a future that was being throttled. All the wealth of the area that should have been supporting the locals was going to Rome in the form of taxes.

Yet, in the midst of it, Jesus promises, "Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

It was not good time for the area. There were rumblings underneath it all, of course. There were a few protests. But, in toto, it looked like no one really recognized the problems or were able — or willing — to do a thing about it: not the high priests, not the poor themselves, not the local politicians who were on the take from Rome and, thus, disinterested in their own constituents.

But all is not lost. Think a bit. Jesus, in the Beatitudes, tells them what to do about it all. "Hunger and thirst for righteousness," he says.

Our question? How?

Did you ever stand near a hot stove and watch water boil? You should; it's an interesting social process. At first sight, it seems as if the water in the pan is so cold it will never heat up. Then, suddenly, there is a bubble or two on the bottom of the pan, closest to the heat. And, suddenly, all at once, where there had been seen to be only disinterest, the steam begins to rise from nowhere and the waters begin to roar and roll.

That, I think, may be happening now, too. I saw two hints as I write this that the country — after years of protests about police brutality, women's equal rights, justice for all — may be beginning to boil over.

In the first instance, a German nun by the name of Sr. Philippa Rath, from a **Benedictine monastery in Rüdesheim, Germany(link is external)**, calls for the church, the Vatican, and the pope to begin to recognize the equality of women as well as end the violence against women everywhere. And what's more, **she did it on a live podcast(link is external)**. Meaning, she cast her seeds to the wind so they could take root everywhere, (No small public statement by a nun from a monastery founded by St. Hildegard of Bingen in 1165 and restored in 1904.)

Secondly, a Catholic family in Baltimore protested when their teenage daughter was made by the local priest **to change her LGBT pride shirt(link is external)** — in public — at the Catholic school she attends. The cause? A spokesman for the archdiocese said, "The attire contained imagery and language with a message that could be determined to oppose teachings of the Catholic Church." The family is now waiting for a public move toward diversity at the church and, the mother says, "an apology would be nice."

What's more, the girls' teenage friends and large numbers of other parishioners rose up to defend her, as well. Small, isolated bubbles, perhaps, but bubbles, nevertheless.

If wearing an emblem that speaks to the humanity, the naturalness, the equality of LGBT people "opposes Catholic teaching," what shall we do about clerical sexual abusers, wife beaters, rapists, tax dodgers, and unvaccinated resisters to bring order to society and real morality to religion?

If we can't wear articles of clothes celebrating the multiple demonstrations of sexual orientation, are we saying that those who — presumably by the action of God's creation — have been born gay do themselves also oppose Catholic teaching? Just by being born? And that says "what" about the Catholic theology of God? Think!

To recoil from that kind of skewed morality is what you call to "hunger and thirst for righteousness." That's when enough is enough. That's when a white jury **notes resoundingly**([link is external](#)) that killing a Black man for taking his daily run through a white residential area is in fact murder and a crime.

No doubt about it, we're in a very difficult moral moment in one of the most "morally" defined but confusing governing philosophies in history. Things are happening now that just 10 years ago would have been unheard of, absolutely unacceptable until scientists have to begin to wonder how much pressure the center can stand before it rends itself in two.

Indeed, the fault lines are straining: We elect politicians now with not so much as a nod to moral character before election or after it. We send people to Congress to "cancel" the other party's president, not to pass legislation together that will develop every segment of the country. We talk about equality but wait in vain for the Supreme Court to uphold it.

We promise basic "freedom and justice" for all and maintain that the Bill of Rights belongs to all dimensions of society — except for the ones who don't qualify for it, of course. Like Brown people, Black people, Muslim people, Latino people, female people and those who want gun control in the United States, among others.

Most concerning of all, the very parties and political bodies meant to maintain the moral and civil standards hold themselves and their colleagues to no standards at all. In fact, they themselves are far too frequently the most reprobate, least civil, most cowardly, brazenly silent, and least moral of them all.

A bubbling pot of water is just like that. It takes a long time to boil, but little by little, the isolated bubbles begin to heat, to rise, to roll over the edges of a society playing with notions of insurrection, political dictatorship, public indecency, and organized division.

When will any of them begin to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" again amongst themselves? Not simply the bold and blustering ones but the ones who are so dangerously silent that the rest of the country looks for help and finds nothing and no one who will carry the American flag back to the flagpoles of yesterday. Nothing and no one.

Nothing and no one. Now there is the real problem.

And yet, it is not the impossible for which we seek. On the contrary: World War II wasn't impossible, as unprepared as we were for it. The Civil Rights Act was not impossible, as dead set against it were most of the country at the time. A Catholic president in a Protestant country was

not impossible, as dangerous as the idea seemed. A Black president in a white culture was not impossible in a country where Blacks were only about 10% of the entire population at the time.

No, when you and I decide we've had enough of a country, and God forbid, whatever churches, too, that tolerate hate and call it holiness, just as we once accepted the Irish, the Polish, the Japanese — all the "others" that were once among us — we will win again. In our "hunger and thirst for righteousness" we will bubble up, one at a time, boil over together. And then, as Jesus promises us in the Beatitudes, we will all be happy again.



A child plays with a balloon Nov. 13, 2016, in Douma, Syria. In previous years, sanctions by the United States denied industrial parts to Syria and crippled its airline industry. (CNS/Reuters/Bassam Khabieh)

Blessed are the merciful — for our sakes

The spiritual scorecards of the last month are, at best, distressing.

The virus is still here while some of the population [refuses to get vaccinated](#) for the sake of the rest of the country [if not for themselves](#). One politician [stands between](#) the stability of middle-class families and the education of their children. Polarization remains the name of the current American Congressional game. (Who's winning, who knows?) Democracy teeters on its edges as it twists back and forth.

So what is the Christian answer to all of that?

Let's see now:

If we're meek, we're doomed to suffer silently, right? Answer: No.

If we're poor of spirit, we're supposed to accept life as it? Answer: No.

If the circumstances of life are difficult for us, we're meant to welcome its sadness and go on anyway? Answer: No.

If a system is unjust, we're required to make the best of it? Answer: No.

Or, if people are undermining the pillars of society, we're supposed to be merciful to them and forget it's happening? Answer: "Blessed are the merciful," the fifth beatitude contends, "for they shall receive mercy."

For those for whom that fifth beatitude is seen as a kind of recess, a relief, a break from the rest of Jesus' concerns about hunger, righteousness, meekness, mourning, poverty of spirit — all of them somehow entwined with justice — hold it. Not so fast. The question is, what do we have here, a confused Jesus? A confused you? Or a bad case of holy inconsistency?

Is mercy really meant to be a mitigation of justice?

The moral problem is a serious one and, as a matter of fact, is plaguing this society at this time in its development in frightening new forms. Ever since the United States invented one-easy-way-to-hold-the-global-village-captive to nuclear bombs, the whole question of justice has become fogged. Now what does the world do to bring evil to heel when, clearly, nuclear attacks are not an answer to global tax fraud, for instance, or underground cyberattacks, possibly?

Or even less certain, when a country's only major export is held up by international sanctions and its citizenry reduced to poverty as a result, how just is that? Syria, for instance, was denied industrial parts by the United States that crippled its airline industry. What would seem to have been a very [targeted response to civil corruption](#) created a ripple effect that touched the economy of the entire country. And the dictator that set off that silent attack is still in power, and the people are still poor.

In our own situation, the [failure of China to produce more automobile chips](#) is now affecting our own capacity to produce cars and so protect the automobile industry here, as well as raising prices for workers who can't get to work without a personal vehicle.

What happens to justice when mercy takes over has never been meant to be anarchy or destitution, or economic collapse, or regional destruction. And so?

Then the fifth beatitude, mercy, raises major political, civil and moral issues. Is mercy a function of politics at all? Is mercy a civil obligation that overrules the civil law? Is mercy a pillar of society — and who says so?

The kind of mercy we give, Jesus says, will be the kind of mercy we get when we need it. Which means that mercy is clearly not an event; mercy is a way of being in the world. It is the ability to identify with the sufferings of another and then accompany them while they struggle with them.

Mercy is not so much some kind of quickly compassionate act for another as it is the foundation of an ongoing relationship — if not with this one particular person as it is with the many caught in the same darkness. It is not so much a commitment to law as it is coming to understand the struggles of the other.

Most of all, mercy is the beginning of a movement of the soul. To become merciful, we must first become aware of injustice and how it happens. It is beginning to see what we have failed to

understand before: that the frequency of gun violence in the bowels of the city, for instance, comes from the lack of all manner of life's needs there.

The second step of mercy is a call for justice by the just, by those who have failed to see for centuries now that justice is often the most unjust system of them all. On the other hand, the percentage of minorities incarcerated for life while the wealthy had lawyers who got them deals are clear signs of our own failure to see the difference.

The third dimension of mercy lies in its commitment to compensation for the injured who have been left behind by society for generations as well as support for those whose social rank serves them well.

The fourth criteria of genuine mercy is the acceptance of those whose lives do not match our own for status and dignity, for education and ability and bright, shiny couth.

From where I stand, the polarization of the dignified and urbane from the average and the suffering is greater than ever. In the 1960s, we could hear the heartbeat of equality beating under our feet as it rose up to claim its place one generation after another. Now over 50 years later, what we hear is the slamming of solid doors against those others we never expected to see on our side of town.

It is the Beatitudes that call us beyond ourselves to the best of ourselves. But until the leadership of the country does the same thing, it will be unconscionably too long until "mercy" becomes the icon of the land again. Let us pray.

Happy are peacemakers who wake up the rest of US

Jan 27, 2022

by [Joan Chittister](#) [OpinionJusticePeople](#)

[20200212T1255-POPE-THIRTEEN-ADLIMINA-602235.jpg](#)



Pope Francis greets Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, during an audience with U.S. bishops making their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Feb. 10, 2020, to report on the status of their dioceses. (CNS/Vatican Media)

It's all very ironic.

It's very difficult to talk about peace in the United States without starting a fight. There's at least one in every crowd who hail the strongman need for keepers of the peace who are willing to fight in order to keep it.

Those types were there at the beginning. They were the ones who were in favor of suppressing Native Americans by moving them off their own land now that we were here and declared that land ours. Then, astonishingly, called themselves "peacekeepers" when Indigenous people fought back.

And they were still here 350 years later when we dropped two planet-splitting bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — despite the fact that the end of the war was already in sight — in order to see which bomb could do the most damage. In case we needed to use it again ... to keep the peace, of course.

It all comes down to a view of the world that teaches "take what you want and threaten what you must" to "keep the peace." Then everyone will all be happy — as the beatitude says.

Right.

Unless, of course, being peaceful is not about squashing disagreement and obliterating whomever stands in our way. Unless it's about not fighting, or destroying life and traditions and whole swaths of people who are simply different than we are.

The problem is that the Jesus who died on a cross and would not fight to descend it leaves us looking for ways to keep the peace without suppressing and destroying the rest of society to get it.

Having said that, the church has never been all that good in teaching this beatitude. In fact, the church has a history of getting to "peace" itself through slaughter and suppression and enslavement and all manner of other things we refuse to remember as an institution. Like the [Crusades](#). And the [Inquisition of the Jews](#). And the persecution of Christians who were committed to a different version of Christianity. And, oh yes, like the battles fought to decide which candidate would become pope in the Middle Ages.

So, here we are, never actually forgiven our obligations to peacemaking but never really wholeheartedly committed to it either. Instead, the unarguable reasons for not doing it were discretely instilled over the centuries. As the weapons got bigger and bigger and the armory more and more lethal, we have all managed to practice more dismay than moral determination. "Yes, but," we wail, "what can one person do?" Or, "after all, we have to defend ourselves." Or, "they started it."

The counterarguments are all true, yes, but groundless.

Yes, we have the right to defend ourselves but surely not with devices capable of killing every child in its path for 20 miles around.

And yes, they started it but haven't we really been fueling it with our own taxpayers' money for over 75 years while those same children have grown up without three meals a day, or couldn't afford college educations, or didn't have medical insurance, or lived in unheated walk-up rooms in some slum-landlord's moneymaking hole?

Isn't all of that violence, too? Aren't we required to address that?

Shouldn't we be wondering how it is that we go on arming ourselves to deliver death to unseen enemies while our society is dying in other ways at our own hands as a result?

And now our so-called representatives and senators tell us that those social things are too expensive for them to allow while they have [pumped the military budget](#) up and up, over and over, for all the years of our lives?

Yet, dark as Catholic/Christian history may be, it's possible that we may be living at a moment when the Catholic world begins to teach the difference between fighting and solving human problems through less barbarian means.

What's happening?

First and foremost, for instance, Santa Fe Archbishop John Wester — the diocese that is at the center of nuclear development — has written a pastoral letter "[Living in the Light of Christ's Peace](#)." Most of all, it is a letter that does not call for deterrence, as has become common. Instead, this one calls us to work for the abolition of all nuclear weapons.

[20200728T1228-WESTER-JESUITS-SANTA-FE-797580.JPG](#)



Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, gives the homily during Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica Feb. 10, 2020, while he and other U.S. bishops from the Southwest region made their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

This letter is a strong and holy one: It calls for diocesan recommitment to the nuclear issues in very concrete ways.

First, he calls for parishes to hold public conversations to determine the actual public steps that can be taken to open the nuclear conversation across the country again.

Wester calls us to press for [The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#). It has been [ratified by 86 countries](#) so far but not one of [the nine nuclear powers](#) — the U.S., China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Israel or North Korea — [have signed it](#).

Obviously, we have work to do.

He reminds us to realize that we have far exceeded "nuclear deterrence" with a few hundred nuclear weapons. In fact, we now have over thousands of them. Thousands of nuclear weapons. To be justified how?

He reminds us that we are, ironically, destroying ourselves and our country in the name of defense.

The archbishop's letter is a humane, holy and understandable approach to a topic that has often unleashed passions so deep they were actually ineffective everywhere.

At the same time, this letter, I admit, strikes me in a very tender place. Like Wester, I went to Hiroshima, too. I visited the museum, too. I saw the clothes that had been radiated into pieces of brick wall as the person who had been wearing them literally disappeared into the ether. Then I followed the two-part diorama that shows on one side of it a model of the bustling and developed city of Hiroshima until — on the other side of the divider— there was nothing left but one teetering tower and a hunk of brick here and there. I looked at it and blinked. In seconds, Model A had become Model B. And behind it, in simple frames on the wall, were two letters from President Harry Truman commanding the U.S. Air Force to refrain entirely from [bombing five Japanese cities](#) — Kyoto, Yokohama, Kokura, Hiroshima and Nagasaki — so we could find out which of the two new bombs would do the most damage.

I am an American! Standing in that crowd in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the embarrassment of it consumed me. I could feel the tears pour down my face before I could attempt to dry my eyes. I turned my back away from the crowds pushing behind me to continue the tour.

And then, out of nowhere it seemed, I felt someone put their arms around my waist and say softly in my ear, "I'm so sorry. We cry, too, sometimes, but we don't want you to cry."

It was my young teenage Japanese guide with a searing lesson in forgiveness and universal care at the same time.

[20200828T0900-VATICAN-NUCLEAR-TESTS-1004321.jpg](#)



Nagasaki, Japan, is pictured four years after an atomic bomb was detonated over the city Aug. 9, 1945. (CNS/Milwaukee Journal Sentinel files, USA TODAY NETWORK via Reuters)

From where I stand, it is clear that violence starts at the top for us. Under the aegis of "defense," we have come to exalt the kind of violence that undermines every layer of our entire society. It corrupts our children, it unmoors our relationships, it blinds us to the poison in our national heart while we get less and less happy every day.

We have been called by strong bishops over the years, all of whom understood this infection in the body politic. Bishops Thomas Gumbleton, Raymond Hunthausen, Leroy Matthiesen, and 75 other bishops who led the American episcopacy into [the first peace pastoral](#) in the United States precede a bishop who is waking us up again to what the Beatitudes are really all about.

The difference is that Wester is alone and standing in what came to be the center of the "American Nuclear Soul" in Santa Fe calling us again to examine our American consciences. As [Pope Francis said](#) at the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima on Nov. 24, 2019, "The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral. ... How can we speak of peace even as we build terrifying new weapons of war?"

Who says that no one can do anything important alone? We have a bishop now who by standing up alone may — we can hope — wake this country up again to the place of conscience in the life of the Beatitudes.

Provided, of course, that we are willing to stand there — alone — as well.

'Purity of heart' beatitude is at the core of what we need in this country

Feb 17, 2022

by [Joan Chittister](#) [OpinionPoliticsTheology](#)

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(Unsplash/Ante Gudelj)

There's always something.

In fact, a good deal of the Bible can easily be dismissed as foreign to the modern world. So much of every book of the Bible is in need of interpretation in a world of digital icons and multiple translations, not to mention the very archeology of the place.

On every page, something cries out for cultural, social or historical explanations. As in, what exactly is a burning bush or a sea of reeds or the vizier of the pharaoh. Some people let that kind of information go by. Others study most of their lives, one Scripture after another, to apply thousands of years of the spiritual life to this one. And, to tell the truth, all of that is an enriching and soul-stretching exercise.

But not everything in Scripture lies behind a plexiglass of uncertainty, of confusion and ancient script. Not, for instance, in the first six Beatitudes of Jesus.

On the contrary, the Beatitudes have a very clear place in life. Anybody's life anywhere. Yours, mine, the Iraqi refugee next door. The Jewish and Black and Asian home or convenience store or political implications down the street. The Beatitudes are not a denominational code of professional religion. They are the about the parameters of what it means to be equally human, always needy, forever aware of what it is to be one of the "children of God."

The Beatitudes of Jesus are easy to spot. They make sense. They provide a veritable way of life for those who take them seriously.

Justice, mercy, meekness, peacemaking, mourning and righteousness — the first six Beatitudes of Jesus — are easy to spot. They are not just aphorisms, pretty prayers or a recitation piece.

The Beatitudes are verbs. They set out to do things. They change us and everything around us. In fact, to be real at all, they require a very public demonstration of very important dimensions of life.

We're either fair and just with people — or we're not — and if we are not, they know when they're being exploited.

Being [merciful](#) to others eases their lives and helps them to start over in life with dignity, with their sins forgiven and life renewed.

[Humility](#) makes us comfortable when we're out of our comfort zones. It takes our differences and turns them into a family of equals. It forbids the oppression of others and prods us to speak the truths of life at all times.

When we [grieve](#) for people in the midst of their hardship or losses, we take them out of their deserts of loneliness and give them a new sense of life when life goes dry and empty.

Most of all, the [righteous](#) rejection of evil and our commitment to the needs of others is the glue that brings families, neighborhoods, the world together.

Indeed, the Beatitudes of Jesus change the very core of life.

Jesus did not preach the Beatitudes as lulling examples of soft poetry, though poetry they are. They are within us, the steel spine of life. They hold us up through everything. They enable us to build a new world around us. They are here to enable us to hold up the weakness of the human race, and remind us that we are the co-creators of a world in pain just waiting for us to notice it. Near us. With us. In our own backyards. And with all those others, as well.

Good. But what about the seventh beatitude? Happy are the "pure of heart for they shall see God"? Now that's something else entirely.

Being "pure of heart" is not satisfied by physical behaviors or mere acts of public charity. It has nothing to do with changing my behavior in a way that will make you comfortable or give you security or contribute to your physical well-being. Or even if it does, I will never know why you did it. You see, the seventh beatitude is all about motives. Mine.

Jesus is very clear about that when he confronts the scribes and Pharisees, saying, "You brood of vipers and hypocrites. You tell the people that they are no longer bound to care for their elderly parents" — a major ethical principle of Judaism — provided they now make an offering, or *korban*, to the keepers of the Temple instead.

So, what are these religious officials doing here? Is the intention to see that the older generation is cared for or to make money for the Temple itself? Listen carefully: The deal is that the religious obligation of the children can now be met by paying the Temple officials the money rather than using it for the direct caring of their parents. Clearly the motive is toxic. Whatever good may be done on the side this way — though Jesus doesn't name any — the fact is that it was not done for the right reason.

Clever, indeed.

In fact, purity of heart has to do with intentionality, with why I really do things. With my motives. With the real reason for what I do, which, however good it makes me look on the outside, may indeed be poisonous on the inside.

Being "pure of heart," is not an obsolete factor in the spiritual life. In fact, it seems to be the very core of what we need in this country right now but are finding so difficult to determine.

Why are congressional representatives, for instance, [continuing to declare Donald Trump's lie](#) that this legally honest presidential election was stolen from him, was actually a fraud, was taken from him by all sorts of nefarious and nonexistent evidence? Why? Because they actually believe it? Or because they will do anything to cater to Trump enough to receive his endorsement of their own election? But which is it: a hidden political gain or a genuine commitment to the good of the nation?

Have these leaders of ours been fooled, too — or are they simply pulling the strings of Trump's paranoia for their own good? It's an important question. After all, the integrity of the country is at stake.

Which, in that case, means that the country will be sending liars to Congress consciously, foolishly, and with what credentials to prove that they are really operating in our best interest?

And if we ourselves do not call those motives out, who will be the real fools in the end: Trump? Trumpers? Republican shills who want the seat more than they want honest government, a good future, a just system? The Lexico Dictionary [calls the shill](#) "an accomplice of a confidence trickster or swindler who poses as a genuine customer to entice or encourage others."

Their dishonesty lies in the fact that it's all for their own sake, for the sake of a congressional seat they intend to win even if they have to lie to get it.

The national spiritual malignancy lies in this: Those who will lie to you to get your support will lie to you when they get it, as well. Their seat will not be for your good. Not for your sake. Not for the sake of the welfare of the country. Not to make the country, the future, the children of tomorrow secure.

No, what the shill does is whatever the shill must do to reap the harvest for their own benefit. And when lying is for their own good, they will do it to you again.

From where I stand, it seems to me that of all the Beatitudes we're in need of at this moment in time, purity of heart may be the one that the political, social, moral dimension of the government may be in need of most. If the preservation of the Constitution, the commitment to democratic principles, the integrity of its representatives is not central, what will be?

Only purity of heart can save us now. A precious few have stood to call out the lie.

As Jesus said later, "Where are the others?"

Happy are those who are willing to be persecuted themselves for justice

Mar 10, 2022

by [Joan Chittister](#) [OpinionPoliticsTheology](#)

This article appears in the [War in Ukraine](#) feature series. [View the full series.](#)
[20220307T1325-UKRAINE-US-REFUGEES-1522719.jpg](#)



People near the White House in Washington gather for a protest March 6, against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (CNS/Reuters/Sarah Silbiger)

I was sitting down to think the whole thing through when it happened.

This is the last review and analysis of the Christian Beatitudes from the point of view of the 21st century. I have been asking each of the Eight Beatitudes of Jesus — as recorded by the evangelist Matthew in Chapter 5, Verses 3-30 of the Christian Scriptures — to justify its own existence. To clarify for us its real function in the here and now. If, as a matter of fact, there can possibly be one. To explain to us how it is that such a spiritual program is really still useful to the modern seeker. I wanted to try to determine if these age-old values are still anywhere near pertinent to the development of an individual's spiritual life in this day and age.

Are they, in fact, still a necessary dimension of spiritual concern in modern life or merely a memory of the gentle and caring Jesus?

I got the surprise of my life: Not only are the Beatitudes nice poetic thoughts, they are more than needed. They are paramount to our own attitude shaping. They are the filters through which we must see the world.

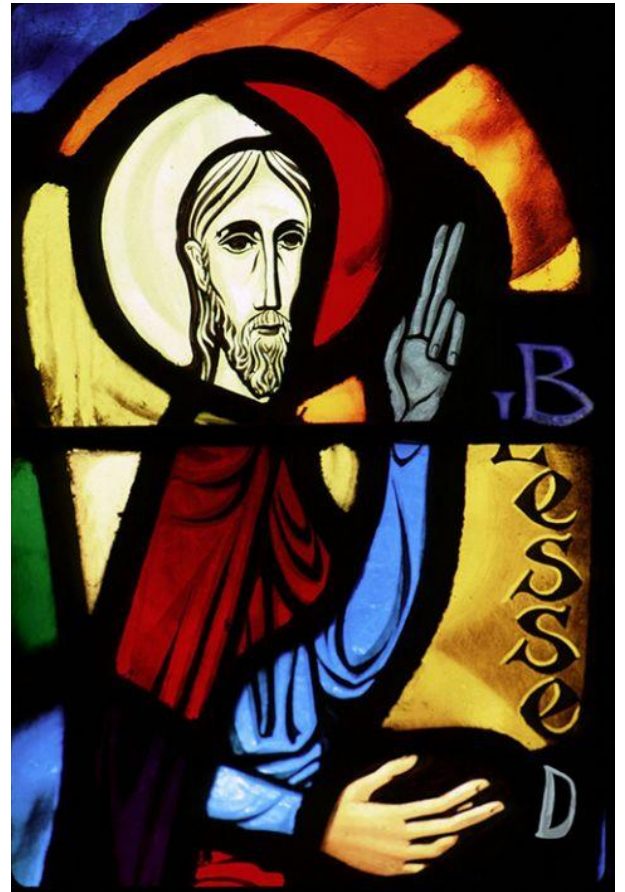
One at a time, I began to recognize the almost unbelievable mitering of the Beatitudes with the public arena at present some 2,000 years after they were written. But even more eminent, I became conscious of the fact that every single beatitude functions that way: These scriptures — these humble Beatitudes — are a multi-dimensional guide through life for us all.

Poverty of spirit. It seemed to me — as the United States was packing up and leaving Afghanistan — [poverty of spirit was more than simply a current concern](#). It was, I thought, lifelong proof of how it is that pride really does come before a fall. America the Great had spent years trying to turn the Afghanis who did not understand our ways, our language or our goals into a Central Asian model of us. Maybe, it seemed to say, it might be better if we supported other countries largely from the outside while they decided inside themselves who and what they really wanted to be.

The kind of meekness that makes it possible for us to hear the concerns of others makes us shapers of the future. [This beatitude leads us to see](#) that respect for the other is exactly what teaches us how to be an ethical nation, a compassionate people. It helps us appreciate other cultures. It makes us willing to take a deeper look at ourselves — the quality of our own motives and the softening of our own presence — as we stride like Hercules through the world. We are so sure that we are the brightest, the best, that we stumble in the chauvinism that makes us blind. We echo in ourselves at large the narcissism which our immediate past president was keen to point out. In the face of every challenge, he told us that he/we were "the only ones who could fix it."

And so drunk with our own "greatness," we fail and fail and fail at what it means to be a good Christian in a bleeding world.

Learning to mourn for those whom, as a people, we have left behind socially, economically and educationally [demands an overhaul of the entire engine of society](#). Indeed, the great turbine of America functions for the security, the dignity and the opportunities of many but not for all. By our very lack of interest in legislation meant to equalize a democratic society, we belie the grace of mourning.



A church window depicts Jesus giving his Sermon on the Mount, which begins with the Beatitudes.
(CNS/Crosiers) 20211202T1231-FAITH-ALIVE-2-1-1513310.jpg

To hunger and thirst for righteousness so that life becomes an exercise in growth and possibility for everyone brings happiness, [the Beatitudes declare](#). It is not a matter, we learn here, of simply encouraging other people to grow. It is a moral imperative that we help them to grow. That we be as solicitous for the welfare of others as we are for our own. Then we do not live for laws; we live to form attitudes within us that can serve as a mirror for others. More than that, we confirm our own values as a nation, and so become a better country ourselves.

Mercy is the beatitude that never gives up. [Here we forego devotion to goodness](#) that disguises itself in neurotic perfectionism only to get colder and more rigid with everybody else every day. It hides itself behind rule-keeping that punishes others rather than supports them as they seek their better selves. The one who has no mercy has no idea how mercy changes the world.

The pure in heart are those who do the right things for the right reason. Anything other than that cannot be trusted. Worse, [doing the right thing for the wrong reasons](#) makes us rogue Christians at best. Too often we hold up as model citizens those who ignore the needs of others in order to magnify, to inflate, themselves. The Beatitudes tell us that we cannot allow the compass of the heart to fail us in favor of celebrity when we need good the most.

Peacemakers [refuse to make force an instrument](#) of the God who gave us all free will. We are not here to develop ourselves alone. We are here to bring holy protection to every single person on the planet. It is by protecting those in the face of danger that we can bring peace to the world. Destroying others in the name of peace only makes us what we reject.

From where I stand, as I watch each of the Beatitudes shine the light of God in our dark world, the Beatitudes come to flesh in a very special way.

This very week, we are seeing the poor in spirit abandoned.

We have watched the meek defeated.



One of the Beatitudes is displayed in a church window. (CNS/Crosiers) 20030828T0900-WINDOW OF BEATITUDE-1232549.jpg

We have seen those who mourn struck down by the sight of the wanton wounding of the simple, the vulnerable and the innocent in the unprovoked war on Ukraine.

We have watched as all of Europe has stood up, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, by saying no to a murderous dictator. We have seen what it means to refuse to accept the unholiness of the motives driving the destruction of the innocent. We have ourselves begun to wage a battle of ideas within us about how to participate in protecting the defenseless from the threat of military might they did not foment. Peacemakers have been standing up for all saying no to suppression, no to injustice, no to the destruction of the little ones. And most holy of all, saying yes to peacemaking by refusing to add bombs to bombs.

We have seen one group, one country, one person, one leader after another risk being persecuted for standing up for justice. Finally, humanity is doing this time what the world did not do in the face of evil and under the threat of Hitler until it became far too late.

[20220308T0845-UKRAINE-CRISIS-UN-RUSSIA-WALKOUT-1522789.jpg](#)



Mélanie Joly, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, Yevheniia Filipenko, Ukraine's permanent representative to the United Nations at Geneva, and other delegates gather with a Ukrainian flag after walking out of the U.N. Human Rights Council meeting during the video speech by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the United Nations March 1 in Geneva. (CNS/Denis Balibouse)

So why is all this review necessary? Because the eighth beatitude is the one that really pulls it all together and makes each of them real. The sight of one isolated national president and all of you, of us, of the nations standing up to say "No!" emphatically, "not in our name, not in this place,

not this time." Together, as human beings, we and other nations have insisted that the will of God for all creation be made new.

"Happy are those who are willing to be persecuted for my name's sake," the eighth beatitude says. Suddenly hope and courage and commitment and authenticity come alive. You see, it's not simply personal perfection that counts where the Beatitudes are concerned. It is the standing up together in the face of evil that is the real task.

We recognize that we may well suffer hardship — higher oil prices, more resources to care for all the refugees, possible retaliation by not only the evil dictator but by other nations that align themselves with that dictator. We are all interconnected, and so yes, when some of us stand up to the bully, we may all be persecuted in the name of God's righteousness. But to do so willingly, even in the face of persecution and privation, is the heart of the eighth beatitude and the coming of a happier and holier world.

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice? Yes, of course. But most of all, happy are those who are willing to be persecuted themselves, if necessary, to bring justice to others.



Joan Chittister

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