

Homily for the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First, a few questions...

What makes you happy?

What is there about you that's deserving of honor?

What is there about your life that others might highly esteem?

The Greek word (*makarioi*) translated here as "blessed" translates just as well as "happy," or "deserving of honor" or "highly esteemed."

But Jesus' categories of "blessed" or "happy" are very unusual.

Are we *happy* when we grieve and mourn?

Do we feel *blessed* when we're insulted?

Do we *esteem* the meek?

Are they *happy* who hunger and thirst for justice?

Is it a *blessing* to be falsely accused? an honor to be persecuted?

Of course there are here those three more user-friendly categories: *Blessed* are the *merciful*, the *clean of heart*, the *peacemakers*...

But I wonder...

At a birth, or graduation, or wedding,
when we think of our children's futures and hope they'll be
"happy and blessed, highly honored and esteemed..."
do we find ourselves praying they'll be merciful?
wishing they'll be clean of heart?
hoping they might become peacemakers?

In a world of "What you see is what you get..."
and "You get what you pay for..."
and "The more you make the more you can get..."
the Lord's categories for happiness can sound
strange, odd, mistaken -- certainly, paradoxical.

Here, as he so often does, Jesus turns upside down
our assumptions and expectations:
he turns them inside out and asks us to look again, and again,
at what we take for granted
and to reevaluate our hopes and our dreams for happiness.

St. Paul is doing the same turn-around of expectations
in the second lesson today:

*God chose the foolish to shame the wise.
God chose the weak to shame the strong.
God chose the lowly and despised, those who count for nothing,
to reduce to nothing those who are something.*

The scriptures today pose some hard questions for us.
- In all the world's craziness,
do we seek - and where do we find - what's truly wise?
- In all our weaknesses,
do we look for - and where do we find - strength that endures?
- In all the choices we make,
what do we value as honorable, as *something* worthy of our love?

There are many "hot button" issues in the Church,
questions that are argued and debated again and again.
But at the root of all these is one that comes before all the others
and that's the question I began with,
What makes us happy?
What is truly honorable and deserving of our esteem?
What are the real blessings in life?

The Lord answers those questions in today's gospel
and invites us to take an honest inventory of ourselves.

In a nutshell, these scriptures ask us to look at life
through the eyes of God and to see what the Lord sees
- and to live accordingly.

If we don't listen, we'll be ignorant of how God sees.
If we don't look, we'll fail to see what the Lord sees.
If we don't align our hearts with God's, we won't see at all.

We're about to approach the Lord's Table
where only those who see with eyes of faith
will see in the bread we offer, the Body of Christ...
will see in the cup we share, the Blood of Christ...
will see in the Crucified, the One who is most blessed,
most worthy of our honor and esteem.

Although he was falsely accused, he was merciful to all;
although he was insulted and defiled, he remained clean of heart;
and although he was unjustly persecuted he made peace
between heaven and earth, between God and us.

And at the Supper of this table he offers us here
the sacrifice he offered once on the Cross.

Blessed then are we who see with eyes of faith

and find in the simple meal of this table
the presence of the One in whom we are all blessed.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*