



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

March 25, 2018 ~ Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

The Fourth Stage of Discipleship Formation

Last Sunday, we featured the third stage of discipleship formation: prayer. We must learn from Jesus Christ Himself *what* to pray, *how* to pray, even *when* to pray – always keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit absolutely needs to be integral to our lives of prayer if prayer is to be truly effective and bear fruit.

The fourth stage of Discipleship Formation resides in the Sermon on the Mount, for we do well to read, study, and pray with Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the Gospel account of Saint Matthew, for as Saint Augustine says to us, the Sermon on the Mount truly is the charter of the Lord's school of Christian living and discipleship.

Now, much of what the Lord teaches in the Gospel is intended specifically for the disciples themselves – that is, those who already *were* disciples. But then there are times when He speaks to everyone, to all the crowd, to the multitudes; the Sermon on the Mount is the preeminent example of this. Pope Benedict XVI calls the Sermon on the Mount Jesus' veritable self-portrait, especially the Beatitudes, which are the beginning of the entire Sermon. Elsewhere, Jesus teaches us what to *do* in our striving for discipleship; in the Beatitudes (and, by extension, in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus goes out of His way to teach us how to *be*...how to *be* disciples and not just what to *do* for discipleship.

And so, the Sermon on the Mount is a teaching that strives to form *all* people in order to make them into disciples; much of what else Jesus teaches then goes on to teach *disciples* so as to make them even *better* disciples. But it all begins with the Sermon on the Mount, addressed to all people of all times and all places...but on the condition of discipleship formation. The Sermon is meant for *all* people to hear because *all* are called by Christ; *all* are called to discipleship.

The fact that Jesus climbs a mount in order to deliver this Sermon is important. It is often observed that just as Moses went up a mountain and brought down the Ten Commandments, so Jesus goes up a mountain and brings down the Sermon; the Sermon on the Mount, then, might be regarded as the Torah (the "Law") of the Messiah. But beyond that: the Lord not only speaks the New Torah, not only brings it down the mountain; He *is* the Torah. He *is* the Word of God, the Word-made-flesh (see John 1). And when we can more fully appreciate that dynamic, then what results is sheer joy: we rejoice in knowing the Lord more fully; we rejoice in the Lord.

The Beatitudes in particular reflect this; just that word itself, "beatitude," communicates the joy that is experienced by those who study the Sermon on the Mount, who listen to the Lord as He preaches it. That word "beatitude" means what it says: "blessed." That is: "joyful." And so it is that the unmistakable mark of discipleship is joy.

There is that joy even in the toughest teachings that are contained in the Sermon: for one, the teaching on adultery and divorce is particularly tough for many of us to hear in today's culture; but also the teaching on anger in one's heart being as bad as murder itself; the teaching on fasting and almsgiving (when so many of us would just rather eat, drink, and be merry). All of these are tough teachings...yet to study them is to study the self-portrait of Jesus Himself, and to do *that* is therefore to know Jesus more intimately and thus to be made into more active and intentional as disciples of Jesus Christ.

~ Fr. Lewis