

#### FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME. 2026

In today's Gospel (Matthew 5:1-12), we have the beginning of the Lord Jesus Christ's "Sermon on the Mount", the Beatitudes. These show us what Jesus of Nazareth was like. Not, as I observed on the last two Sundays, particularly meek and mild, He was unfailingly faithful to His Heavenly Father, and unfailingly compassionate to His fellow humans. Not, as I observed last Sunday, primarily a moral or ethical teacher, He proclaimed the arrival of the Kingdom of God in the hearts and souls of all believers, and described what living in the Kingdom of God looks like. The lives of all of His Saints show the Beatitudes in action. This is not because of their natural goodness or steely will. This is because of the power of God's Kingdom and Spirit within them. They cooperate with that Kingdom and Spirit, but the power to live out the Beatitudes, the power to live a heavenly life on earth, comes not from themselves but from God.

I say that Jesus of Nazareth was not primarily a moral or ethical teacher, but primarily the Bringer of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God does, however, have moral and ethical effects. Living in the Kingdom of God is qualitatively different from living in the Kingdom of This World. One who, by Jesus' Grace and the gift of His Spirit, lives in the Kingdom of God is still living on this earth of ours, but is no longer merely of this earth. He (she) necessarily behaves differently from people who are still living in the Kingdom of This World. Jesus did give some teaching about what living in the Kingdom of God looks like. The Beatitudes are part of that teaching. So is "if someone slaps you on one cheek, turn and offer the other one as well." So is "Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven." So is "your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask, so do not worry about tomorrow - today has troubles enough of its own." So is "The Creator made them male and female, and so a man leaves his father and mother and clings to His wife, and the two become one flesh - so, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore let no man divide what God has joined."

These teachings of the Lord Jesus are not the ethical teachings of another age. They are the ethical teachings of another world. They shocked 1st Century Jews, and they shock 21st Century Americans (who do tend to be easily shocked). They are not relics from a past civilization, they are a rebuke to every civilization, a declaration of independence from all of this world's civilizations, and a pledge of allegiance to a supernatural reality, the Kingdom God.

Only people with complete disrespect for the laws of historical evidence deny the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth, and only the most absurdly stubborn critics deny that the four Gospels are substantially a record of what the first generations of Christians recalled about His life and teachings. More reasonable critics try to evade His teachings by ignoring His main point, the reality of the Kingdom of God, and insisting that Jesus' moral teachings, while admirable for His time and place, are basically products of His time and place, with little to say to our time and place. This is obviously incorrect.

I say "obviously incorrect" because His moral teaching, rooted in His proclamation of the Kingdom of God, was just as abnormal in his time and place as it is in ours. "If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn and offer the other one as well." We have a hard time accepting this. Do you suppose Roman soldiers of Jewish rebels found it easy? "So, do not worry about tomorrow - today has troubles enough of its own." We spend a lot of time and energy worrying about and planning for tomorrow. Do you suppose that Galilean tax collectors and Temple

money changers didn't? No. Jesus' teaching is not rooted in another time. It is rooted in another world.

Nothing proves this more than Jesus' teaching about Marriage. Jesus' teaching, "if a man divorces his wife, except for uncleanness, and marries another, he commits adultery," was not Jewish practice. It was not Roman law. It was what the Kingdom of God did to the fundamental relationship between the two sexes. It was not easy then to give an almost absolute "No!" to divorce. It is not easy now to give an almost absolute "No!" to divorce. Yet that is what Jesus of Nazareth did then and what His Catholic Church is duty bound to do now. It is not part of the ethics of a distant historical era or of this historical era. It is part of the ethics of Heaven.

All of history's other great leaders' statements and teachings are strongly conditioned by their time and place. Because Jesus of Nazareth is not merely a great leader, but also the Word of God made Flesh, His teachings, far from being strongly conditioned by His time and place, are a sharp challenge to every time and place. Mohammad, a great leader in 7th Century Arabia, said, reasonably enough, that a man should limit himself only to as many wives as he could afford, and never more than four. This was a perfectly reasonable teaching in 7th Century Arabia, and 7th Century Arabia was pleased to nod its collective head in assent. Jesus, the Word made Flesh, informed 1st Century Palestine that divorce and remarriage are forbidden in the Kingdom of God. First Century Palestine was shocked, and did not nod its collective head in assent. 20th Century America did not nod its collective head in assent either, as every state legislature hastened to legislate for no fault divorce. First Century Palestine, 7th Century Arabia, and 20th Century America, all found Jesus' teaching to be out of this world, and they all wanted nothing to do with something out of this world. Things that are out of this world are scary.

"A man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This view of the fundamental relationship between the two sexes makes the coming together of a man and woman something with a mystical, otherworldly dimension, as terrifying to Greek and Roman sages as to American legislators and judges. The one flesh union of a man and woman is a sacrament of the Kingdom of God, an effective and physical sign of that Kingdom's presence on earth. Can you accept that?

If you can't, you have a lot of company. Who could possibly accept that unless he (she) had first accepted the Kingdom of God? Certainly, this teaching is not easier in the 21st Century than in the First, for those who do not have Faith. This teaching is an injection into human history of a love and power from beyond human history.

All of Jesus' moral teaching, in truth, is an injection into human history of a love and power from beyond human history. All of Jesus' moral teaching is natural for the Kingdom of God, and shocking to the Kingdom of This World. Jesus' moral teaching does not seem suitable, many say, for 21st Century America. It does not fit our time and place.

Did people think that Jesus' of Nazareth's moral teaching fitted His time and place? Look at the Crucifix, and see the answer to that question.

Jesus of Nazareth's moral teaching is from beyond this world, and is this messed up world's only hope, just as He, the Lord and Savior, is ultimately humanity's only hope. He delivers us from and fear by His Death and Resurrection; and, in His moral teachings, He shows us what a life set free from sin and fear looks like.

