

Four Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Reading I: [Zephaniah 2:3, 3: 12-13](#)  
Responsorial Psalm: [146: 6-7, 8-9, 9-10](#)  
Reading II: [1 Cor 1: 26 - 32](#)  
Gospel: [Matt 5: 1 – 12a](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:  
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/012923.cfm>



James Tissot, 1886

Matthew's Gospel is developed within the early Jewish Christian community. Knowledge of the Old Testament and Jewish practice is assumed. Matthew groups the teachings of Jesus into five sermons, just as the Jewish scriptures began with the five books of the Law. Each of these sermons will present one of the central themes of being a disciple.

The passage for this Sunday begins the first of these sermons. Moses went up the mountain to receive the commandments from God. Jesus goes up the mountain, sits down like an authoritative teacher, and begins to teach the crowds himself. He does not teach like the Pharisees, who quote other teachers to show their orthodoxy. He begins to teach them in his own words.

The Beatitudes present the attitudes necessary for being a disciple. They are structured like the commandments given to Moses. The first ones point to one's relationship with God, and the latter ones toward our relationship. Poor in Spirit calls one to recognize one's need for God. The poor in spirit were those who knew that if God was not part of their life, that life would have no meaning. Thus, they were willing to sacrifice everything, including their lives, to maintain their relationship with God. Fundamental for a disciple is the development of a relationship with God. No amount of money, fame, power, or prestige is more important than one's relationship with God.

Similar attitudes are presented in the other beatitudes. Mourning involves the recognition of a loss. In the case of a disciple, the way one has lived a selfish life, has misused time and opportunity, and has been inattentive, calls for mourning and repentance. Likewise, meekness calls one to own their gifts and weaknesses. It demands honesty with oneself, neither diminishing God's gifts nor exaggerating them. It is living honestly.

One of God's most visible qualities is mercy. God is always ready to forgive and never holds a grudge. A disciple should also be full of mercy, just as the Father is merciful. Jesus' great gift is peace. Living as a disciple should be a sharing of peace with others. It is not just a passing word but being one who brings connections, life-giving connections in all the interactions that one has.

Living the attitudes of the Beatitudes is manifesting the relationships that exist in the reign of God. These attitudes are life-giving to the person and to those with whom one interacts. The Reign of God breaks through all the darkness that exists in society and offers hope that things can be different.

The prophet Zephaniah spoke in the sixth century before Christ. Many of the people had given up on God and turned to political alliances. Zephaniah wrote about the small remnant, the poor of the land who were under the Lord's protection. Even when calamity would come upon the kingdom, they would be under God's protection. When the city of Jerusalem falls, these people, who are devoted to God, will live upon the land and worship God alone.

Corinth was a prosperous seaport with people trying to get ahead. They relied on their skills, reputation, and resources to advance. Paul challenges them that Christ did not seek to succeed by those means. Jesus came as a poor person, suffered, and was crucified. It is in the Lord that one should boast and not about one's accomplishments. The same holds true today. Disciples are called to look to Jesus for an example. Following Jesus may not bring fame and fortune but will yield an eternal relationship with God.

**Key themes:**

- Beatitudes
- Humility
- Poverty of Spirit
- Persecution
- Kingdom of God
- Moral Formation

**Reflection questions:**

- How do the teachings shape my attitudes and values?
- How do you recognize your need for God today?
- What are some of the pitfalls of a person being powerful and affluent?
- What does a Christian risk in challenging the popular norms of society?
- Who offers you an example of living one or more of the Beatitudes?

**Prayer suggestions:**

- For the grace to be poor in Spirit: that we may recognize our poverty wherever God is not at the center of our life and decisions
- For all who show mercy: that the face of God may shine through those who care for the sick and elderly, and those who assist the stranger or those recovering from disasters
- For all who are powerful: that they may use their knowledge, resources, and influence to bring forth God's reign and raise up those who are in great need
- For all who hunger and thirst for righteousness: that the Spirit of God will guide those who work to end discrimination, injustice, abuse, and fraud, and bring forth a new day of healing and honesty
- For all who mourn: that they may know God's presence this day and that we may stand with them and support them through their grief