

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time, A – February 1, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 7:15am & 8:30am Sunday Masses – 645 words

Many of us have had a favorite examination of conscience that we've liked using down through the years – and many of them use the Ten Commandments. Some focus more on the seven deadly or capital sins. But then there are a few that base themselves on the Beatitudes, which we just heard in the gospel. And this is an important angle, because the eight Beatitudes are the virtues required of us for residency in the Kingdom of Heaven. How are we doing in our growth in these virtues?

Yet what are the Beatitudes, but a reflection of our Lord's own soul? Whether we speak of poverty of spirit, mourning – which here means patience with the many trials of life, meekness, the thirst for justice, or any of the others, we see all of them fulfilled perfectly in Christ. And we must always recall the fact that a successful Christian life is imitation of Christ. We are not a "people of the book" – following a dead letter, a list of rules. No, we imitate a person – who also helps us to do so.

It really does depend so much on him – on Jesus. Saint Paul, in the second reading, spoke of this in terms of our own inadequacy. Worldly standards don't much matter when we are all called to a higher standard, and one that, in fact, exceeds everyone's capacity. It all depends on the transformation that God's grace works in us. Grace is a sharing in the divine life that changes us. Being supernatural, it helps us to go beyond the merely natural – and our calling is a supernatural one to be sure.

We know well that the imitation of Christ in general and the living-out of the Beatitudes in particular is counter-cultural. While the world encourages us to pursue materialism and wealth, the Beatitudes – and Jesus' own example – teach us about detachment and delayed gratification. While the world offers to throw us headlong into an abyss of lust, the Beatitudes – and Jesus's own example – teach us about purity of heart. Following this way means being different. But then, we find we are not alone.

No, because then, we are part of that faithful remnant that the Lord has in every age, spoken of by the prophet Zephaniah in the first reading – that group that prioritizes the things that truly matter and strives to put God and his kingdom first in their lives. And how important it is that we band together! One of the most edifying developments that I have seen take place in recent years is the increase in the number of things like fellowship groups and home bible studies. We must stick together!

For the example and encouragement that we give to each other is such a crucial part in growing in and remaining steadfast in the imitation of Christ. In this regard, it bears mentioning, as I have in the past, that today – February 1 – is the third Sunday before Lent, traditionally known as "Septuagesima" or roughly the 70th day before Easter. Since time immemorial, this has been the Sunday when we would begin making our preparations for Lent, so that Ash Wednesday is not a "cold turkey" experience.

And what is Lent, but the season *par excellence* for banding together? We unite in works of prayer and penance to leave sin behind more fully and grow in the love of God and neighbor; that is, to grow in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ. There may yet remain some king cakes to be eaten, but starting today, it would be good, too, if we began forming a solid plan for this Lent, including works of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. God offers us his transformative grace each and every day – but there are times and seasons when that grace flows stronger. The opportunity for a holy Lent awaits us all!