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June 6, 2021

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"As Christ's sufferings overflow in us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow" (2 Cor 1:5).

2 Cor 1:1-7; Matt 5:1-12

Paul's letters to the churches were in circulation a decade or more when Mark wrote his Gospel. All four Gospels show the influences of Paul's idea that all baptized members of the body of Christ got to share in the suffering and glory of the Risen Jesus. This spiritual formation was called the Paschal Mystery. We die with him in order to rise with him.

So, when Mark records the Beatitudes in his Gospel, he is describing what life in Christ looks like. The Christian community has already encountered rejection and some persecution. There is a real cost to being a disciple, but it is experienced as a blessing. How blessed are you who are poor, who mourn, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who show mercy and work for peace. As Jesus suffered, so are you invited to suffer with him, but this is the path to Glory.

The first followers of Jesus did not see themselves as involved in a new religion. They simply described their life in Christ as the "Way." It was a way of life imitating Jesus, whose radical emphasis on care for the poor, acceptance of sinners, as witnesses to mercy and reconciliation, eventually brought him into conflict with the authorities. His followers likewise experienced opposition, rejection and persecution. The Beatitudes helped them interpret their experience as sharing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

We find our baptismal maturity and fulfillment in following the same Way. Our Beatitudes are revealed each time there is some cost to our discipleship: When do not insist on our own status and honor, we are poor in spirit, but set free from the need for approval. When we show compassion, we are blessed by solidarity with the suffering of others. When we long for a more just world, we share the work of changing the world others are doing. When we seek clarity and truth, we uncover God's purpose in our world. When we do not take sides but seek to resolve conflicts, we help repair the world and create community.

To live this way is to know Christ more and more, and there is no greater blessing possible.

Reprinted from 2017

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