

COLUMNISTS

Beatitude 'bombshells' reverse values

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 5:1-12. (R1) Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13. (R2) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

This year of 1996 is Cycle A in the church's liturgy. This means that the Gospel readings for the Sundays will be taken mainly from the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

About A.D. 41 the new emperor Claudius named Herod Agrippa King of Judea. Herod Agrippa was an enemy of the followers of Christ. His appointment was a signal for the apostles to scatter to the four ends of the earth to preach the Gospel.

All but James and Peter left Jerusalem. As they had surmised, Herod persecuted the Christians: He beheaded James, and he intended to do the same to Peter. But because of the Passover festival, Peter's execution was postponed. In the meanwhile an angel of God rescued Peter. At this time, John took Mary to Ephesus, where they dwelt until the death of Herod in A.D. 43.

Before the apostles dispersed, however, they wanted a written account of the acts of Jesus so that their teaching would have unity. Naturally, they asked the one most practiced in writing among them to compose this account. The request fell on Matthew, who as a tax collector was accustomed to writing. In A.D. 41, with the help of the other apostles, Matthew wrote his



a word
for
sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Gospel.

Next Sunday, and the other three Sundays before Lent, the Gospels will be taken from Matthew's fifth chapter of the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Eight Beatitudes. Beatitude means happiness. The Eight Beatitudes proclaim the path to happiness. They are bombshells, for they turn the values of the world upside down.

The world says, "Happy are the aggressive, the go-getters, they get ahead." Jesus says, "Happy are the poor in spirit — those who know their limitations and so rely on God and not on self — they will really get ahead; they'll get a heavenly kingdom."

The world says, "Blessed are the complainers, the gripers, the wheel that squeaks gets the grease." Jesus says, "Happy are those who mourn over the injustices in the world, the rejection of God and his good news. In

the end they will see his kingdom come."

The world says in the words of Modest in *Camelot*: "It's not the earth the meek inherit; it's the dirt. So, happy are the slave drivers, for they get results." Jesus says, "Happy are those who are low in their own estimation, they will come out on top."

The world says, "Happy are the hard-boiled; they don't get pushed around." Jesus says, "Happy are the merciful, those who help others in need, they will receive more than they give."

The world says, "Happy are the troublemakers, for they make the headlines." Jesus says, "Happy are the peacemakers, those who put up with misunderstandings and unkindness for God's sake, they shall know the peace the world cannot give."

Jesus not only reversed the standards of value accepted by the world, but he put his finger on the key to a happy life. Things or possessions are not vital; neither are feelings. Activities have a place. But the key to happiness lies in one's attitudes, one's inner life.

In a Midwestern town there was a widow. She was alone in years, but the singular beauty of her womanhood lingered about her like the fragrance of a faded rose. Rich and poor, young and old esteemed her. At graduation

time, the principal of the high school asked her to tell the students "something that life had taught her."

Standing before the young assembly, with a gentle smile, she told them simply: "My dear young men and women, when I was a girl I was taught that I was a body and had a soul. Life has taught me that I am a soul and have a body." That was all. She sat down. That was the secret of her beautiful life: Her soul, her inner life, her thoughts, her attitudes explained her beatitude.

Daily Readings

Monday, Jan. 29

2 Sm 15:13-14, 30; 16:5-13;
Mk 5:1-20

Tuesday, Jan. 30

2 Sm 18:9-10, 14, 24-25, 30; 19:3;
Mk 5:21-43

Wednesday, Jan. 31

2 Sm 24:2, 9-17; Mk 6:1-6

Thursday, Feb. 1

1 Kgs 2:1-4, 10-12; Mk 6:7-13

Friday, Feb. 2

Mal 3:1-4 or Heb 2:14-18; Lk 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

Saturday, Feb. 3

1 Kgs 3:4-13; Mk 6:30-34

Blessed are we who mourn and are comforted

I buried three friends this January and it made me appreciate the work of all those who help us deal with our grief.

One friend was in his 80s and died after a long illness, another was in his 60s and died on the operating table during open-heart surgery, and the third was a 10-year-old boy who succumbed after a long battle with leukemia.

Although the circumstances were very different, in each case a variety of people worked very hard to help the families and friends both mourn and celebrate the lives of the deceased.

First and foremost, of course, were the immediate loved ones, who somehow found the strength to both accept the condolences of the rest of us and



faith &
work

By GREGORY F. AUGUSTINE PIERCE

comfort us in return. If there were ever proof of the ability of people to be heroic, it is on the receiving lines at wakes.

The funeral directors, too, showed that their work is an important ministry. Somehow they are able to handle the inherent sadness of their task;

the comforting of everyone else, with no one thinking to comfort them; the hundreds of details that go into a wake, funeral and burial on such short notice; the occasional criticism that they are somehow profiting unjustly from the misfortune of others.

The priests, lay ministers, music directors, choir, ushers, secretaries and other parish staffs also do wonderful work on these occasions. Sometimes they know well the deceased and the bereaved, but often they do not. Yet in all cases they seem to be there at just the right time, with just the right prayer or word or hymn to comfort the sorrowful.

There are so many other people whose quiet contributions help to make the unbearable bearable: neighbors and friends who bring food,

flowers or offers of help; newspapers that go out of their way to publish careful, timely, thoughtful obituaries; florists who make and deliver special, personalized arrangements; card companies that publish just the right sentiment.

After each of the three funerals, volunteers from the parish organized a reception, which gave people a place to gather and share their grief and memories. In the case of the little boy, his fourth grade class helped serve the food and cleaned up afterward.

What more can the rest of us say except "thank you" to all those who help us mourn? Your work is holy. "Blessed are those who mourn," Jesus said, and blessed we are, for we have been comforted.

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