

6C 2019 SML
LK 6:17, 20-26

Christian faith centers on who Jesus is, and not on what He said. The great creeds, for example, never mention the words of Jesus, but they desperately articulate His identity:

- ✓ God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God
- ✓ Begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father
- ✓ By the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man

Yet having said this, I would be wrong to imply that Christians are indifferent to the teachings of Jesus, as nothing could be further from the truth. Once it was clearly understood that Jesus is God, the first Christians were very interested in remembering, understanding and propagating Jesus' teaching. And, wherever they've been heard, the words of Jesus have proved:

- ✓ fascinating,
- ✓ disorienting,
- ✓ confounding,
- ✓ deeply transformative,
- ✓ and always unforgettable.

Would the end of slavery have happened without Jesus' command to "Love your neighbor as yourself?"

Would changes in the workplace and child labor laws have been enacted without Jesus' exhortation to "Let the children come to me?"

Would the civil rights movement in the United States have gotten under way without Jesus' teaching to "Love your enemy?"

Would Gandhi's liberation of India or the collapse of Communism have been possible without Jesus' summons to nonviolence?

How many persecutors were thwarted by Jesus' words, "Let the one without sin be the first to throw a stone at her!" JN 8:7

How many, locked in resentment and wounded pride, were changed by Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son?

And hitting closer to home with this week's list of abusive clergy, would not the Church lead the way to correct the Church's and society's abuse of minors without Jesus' warning, "Beware of false prophets (priests, from defrocked Cardinal McCarrick to the part time weekend associate) who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves." (MT 7:15)

If I may take a minute . . . Our Holy Father Francis said a few weeks ago that the sexual abuse of minors is not just a Church problem, but a societal problem. He is right. He is speaking the truth. Those whose institutions are as guilty as

the Church are very glad the Catholic Church is their deflector as they do not want the light to shine on them too. But eventually, it will. And when it does, the question will be asked, "What did the Catholic Church do to rectify their problem?" Since the Dallas charter went into effect in 2002, credible allegations of abuse have dwindled to .004 percent. Today, the Church is an incredibly safe place for a child to be. No other institution can own this statistic. Our problem now is healing from the deep, deep wounds of the past. Other institutions will follow our lead and someday, the Church will be recognized for paving the way, as the limelight has first shone on us, as it should. The limelight shining on the Church first is part of God's plan to stop the societal epidemic of child abuse.

The Church paved the way at the turn of the last century with Pope Leo XIII's "*Rerum Novarum*" to end the abuse of children in the labor market. But the day of recognition for paving the way to stop child abuse is far far in the future. And when that day comes, Holy Mother Church will be embarrassed to accept the recognition, given what had to happen in order for the charter to be written in the first place.

So while the throngs followed Our Blessed Lord because of His miracles, they were just as captivated by what He said as evidenced by the first verse in today's gospel:

a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coast region of Tyre and Sidon.

A great place to begin to understand Jesus' teaching is Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, or Luke's Sermon on the Plains as recorded in today's gospel. It's the same sermon, We visited the place where Our Blessed Lord delivered this sermon while we were in the Holy Land, and it is a stretch of land on a beautiful height that overlooks the Sea of Galilee.

While His Jewish audience was quite used to receiving teachings that began with "Thou shalt not," these teachings were met mostly with their breach. How refreshing that the first word out of Jesus' mouth would be "Blessed," or more simply, "Happy." The teaching that Jesus offers in the Beatitudes is a pattern of life that promises, quite simply, to make us happy.

Blessed are you who are now hungry. For those who are physically hungry, of course. But what about those of us who are spiritually hungry? What is the Hunger that defines and orders? For what are we ultimately hungry? God. We are hungry for God. We are hungry for the will of God.

One of the most fundamental problems with the way we think is we hunger for God, but we attempt to satisfy this hunger with something less than God. Aquinas said the four substitutes for God are: wealth, pleasure, power and honor.

Classically the term is concupiscence. Contemporarily, the term is addiction. When we try to satisfy our hunger for God by feeding on something less than God, we frustrate, and then convince ourselves we need more of that finite good, only to again find ourselves frustrated. More of the finite. Name your finite. More frustrated. More and more of the finite. Eventually some of us get it - the finite does not satisfy. Those who don't get it become addicted.

Aquinas also said that if you want to see the perfect illustration of the Beatitudes, look at Christ crucified. Aquinas said if you want beatitude, if you want happiness, despise what Jesus despised on the cross and love what He loved on the cross. He despised the four classical addictions to the four substitutes: not a healthy amount of wealth, pleasure, power and honor, but addictions to wealth, pleasure, power and honor. On the cross He was:

- ✓ naked and not wealthy,
- ✓ nailed and not pleased,

- ✓ chose to be powerless and not powerful
- ✓ despised and not honored.

What did Jesus love on the Cross? He was hungry for the will of the Father. Not my will, but yours be done. When he said, “I thirst,” he thirsted for the will of the Father.

If you have trouble determining God’s will, you are not alone. The questions are endless. Every new responsibility brings new decisions. How in the world do we know what God wants?

To know God’s will, we must totally surrender to God’s will. Our tendency is to make God’s decision for Him. Our tendency is to go to God with a multiple choice of options and expect Him to choose one of our preferences.

Go to Him with empty hands:

- ✓ no hidden agendas,
- ✓ no crossed fingers,
- ✓ nothing behind your back.

Go to Him with nothing else but a willingness to do whatever He says. As Our Blessed Mother’s best advice put it, “Do whatever He tells you.”

Have trouble determining God’s will for you? The Letter to the Hebrews says that if you surrender your will, then He will

“equip you with everything good for doing his will” (Hebrews 13:21). It’s a promise!

So what if for one day—24 hours—Jesus were to become you? Imagine. Your will gets the day off, and your life is led by the will of God. Not my will, but Your will.

- ✓ His priorities govern your actions.
- ✓ His passions drive your decisions.
- ✓ His love directs your behavior.

Would people notice a change? And how would you feel? What effect would this have on your stress level? Would you still do what you had planned to do? Obligations ... appointments ... would anything change?

God’s plan for you is nothing short of a new heart. Ephesians 4:23-24 says, “But you were taught to be made new in your hearts, to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God—made to be truly good and holy.” God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Him. His Will, not ours.