

Sixth Sunday In Ordinary Time  
Sunday 14 February 2010

There is this author by the name of Anthony De Mello, who wrote in one of his books, a parable about a group of tourists. In this parable the tourists are sitting on a bus that is passing through beautiful country-side: lakes, mountains, green fields, and rivers. But the problem is that the shades of the bus are pulled down, so the tourists do not have the slightest idea of what lies beyond the windows of the bus. Meanwhile, their journey is spent squabbling over who is the best dressed, who will be applauded, and who will be well considered. And so they remain this way until the end of the journey. At the end of the parable, De Mello concludes that in our search for happiness, we look in the wrong places while the truly good things pass us by.

In a way, that's kind of what the gospel is about. Where do we really find happiness? Today's gospel, on the beatitudes, gives us a clue. The beatitudes are really at the heart of Jesus' preaching. The beatitudes are a way of living. They go beyond the Ten Commandments. When you look at the Ten Commandments, I guess you could say that it is a list of do's and don'ts. It is essentially, the bare minimum. And so to follow the Ten Commandments, it doesn't require you to change your heart. I mean for example, you can refrain from stealing my wallet, but that doesn't mean that you necessarily care about me right? But the beatitudes are different. The beatitudes are way of being, and not just doing. They are the fullest measure of living the moral life. They go beyond the bare minimum and points out to us what it is that really satisfies us.

To illustrate what I mean, there was a story in the news several years ago about an armored truck driving down the freeway in Columbus, Ohio. And as the vehicle was going along, the back doors flew open, and money started flying out of the back of the truck. Well of course, as you can imagine, everybody behind the armored truck came to a screeching halt, and they got out of their cars and started picking up money. News of this event got out rather quickly, and of course, just as quickly, through the news, people learned who the money belonged to and where they could return the money that they picked up. There was even an award eventually offered for returning the money. And then there was a big debate that ensued about whether or not people were morally obligated to return the money.

To make a long story short, some people never returned the money they picked up, some returned it after accepting the reward, and some had no problem returning the money without accepting the reward. One of these

people was asked why didn't they accept the reward money, and he just simply laughed and said, "I don't need a reward in order to do what I know is right. I'm happy with who I am and what I have because I can wake up every morning with a clear conscience and with Jesus Christ on my side."

You know some people think that living the moral life is nothing more than a string of conflict values. Or in other words, many people think that as we live our lives, we come upon situations where we have to decide whether or not something is right or wrong, and then the rest of life is outside of the moral sphere. But the beatitudes tell us something different. It tells us that living a moral life means living a life of virtue. It's an attitude, it's a way of life, it's a way of being. It is much more than a bunch of decisions based on values, it consumes every moment of our life, and every facet of our being. It is about the way we are, and not just what we do.

Things for example like fasting, prayer, and doing works of charity, these are ways of being poor or hungry or weeping as Luke suggests in today's gospel, and doing these things are a way of developing virtue and living out our life in Christ. And you have to realize that doing these kinds of things doesn't really enter into the consciousness of many people, including secular ethicists, because many people don't realize that living a moral life goes way beyond a bunch of do's and don'ts. The beatitudes remind us that living for this world, or living life with worldly standards or ambitions isn't going to satisfy us in the end. Instead, being a person of faith, being a person of virtue, being a person who is steadfast in their relationship with God, that is what blesses us and keeps us satisfied. And that is what the beatitudes are about.

Because of this, the beatitudes are quite simply, virtues that lead us to the ultimate goal of human existence: which is of course full and active participation in the very life of God. It teaches us to examine our priorities and ask ourselves what is it that we are really looking for in this world, what brings us happiness, and do we ever make misguided attempts towards achieving that happiness? Consequently, we need to do all that we can to make the beatitudes a part of our attitude, and way of being. If we don't, we will never really know how much we have allowed the truly good things in life to have passed us by.

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