

Gospel (Luke 6:20-26):

Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for the Kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are now hungry,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who are now weeping,
for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you,
and when they exclude and insult you,
and denounce your name as evil
on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!
Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.
For their ancestors treated the prophets
in the same way.

But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

But woe to you who are filled now,
for you will be hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will grieve and weep.

Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for their ancestors treated the false
prophets in this way.”

Homily Transcription:

The Beatitudes are found twice in the Scripture, once probably more famous ones in Matthew's Gospel (chapter 5) and in today's Gospel from Luke chapter 6. These Beatitudes, which I just read for you, we hear in the context today of our church besieged. Allegations against priests and bishops continue to be revealed; more and more states with their Attorney Generals ordering the priests to open their their records and now new shocking allegations against nuns in Vermont of abuse of children.

This is a tremendous shock and our church is a long long long way from this idealized image portrayed in Hollywood with *the Bells of St. Mary* or *Going My Way*. I suspect that there's a part of us that longs for that idealized Church of the past that never existed but was this idealized image that Hollywood put up and we like to believe that this is who we are. Where priests were

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extraordinarily good-looking, multi-talented, had little personal needs and seemed to be able to minister to virtually everyone in any situation. What has been revealed is we have a broken church with a very human clergy. Not only our priests but our bishops and officials within the Vatican; not only our priests but our nuns as well. We are a broken church and trust has been broken.

We hear the Beatitudes today in that context: Blessed are you who are poor. You may remember that Pope Francis, and his inauguration as Pope, prayed that we would be a poor church. I'm sure this is not what he had intended but the brokenness and poverty of our Church is now exposed throughout the world. If we have put our faith in human beings, in any priest, in any Bishop, in any Cardinal, in any nun, in any Pope, how sadly disappointed are we? But our faith that gathers us here today is not in any mere human being. Our faith is in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is working through very human instruments—through a very human church—but it is divinely guided by the Holy Spirit. The recent revelations of the failures of our bishops, our cardinals, our priests and now our nuns, have deeply disappointed us, but I pray that it has not shaken your faith. I have had many conversations in the last couple weeks with devout Catholics like yourselves whose faith has been shaken; devout Christians like yourself—Catholic Christians—who have said, "I've had it. I'm done. I'm leaving the Church."

I don't blame them, but I ask you not to join them. This is a time of purification. Blessed are you who are now weeping for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and insult you and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.

Our church is in the midst of the worst scandal the American Catholic Church has ever faced. It is the worst scandal of the last 100 years in the universal Catholic Church, but it is not the worst scandal of the last 2000 years. Some, perhaps, will choose to walk away in discouragement or anger and disgust. I pray that is not you. I pray that is not me. I call you back to a deeper faith in Jesus. I call you back to the faith of the Beatitudes that Jesus announced in today's Gospel. I call you back to a faith in the living word of God which has the power to transform our lives.

Blessed are you who are hungry now for you will be satisfied. I call you back to a deep belief in this Eucharist that however broken the instrument of the priest that stands at that altar, we believe in the true presence that Jesus is given to us; that he feeds the deep hunger and the thirst within our souls.

Blessed are you who are weeping for you will laugh. I call you back to the promise that Jesus made to Simon Peter: "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

Blessed are you when people hate you; when the media defames you; when you are excluded and denounced and insulted on account of your faith in the Son of Man; rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in Heaven. I was talking about these matters with my dear friend father Mitch Pacwa and he recalled an incident from history where Napoleon the Emperor had captured

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Pius VII (this is back in the year 1809) and imprisoned him for years—horribly humiliated him and ordered him to endure tremendous physical suffering—and then Napoleon, as the Pope stood before him, taunted him and said, "I will destroy this church," and Pius VII wryly looked up in the midst of his torment and said, "Emperor, if we priests and bishops and popes have not been able to destroy the church for the last 1,800 years, there's no way that your going to be able to do it."

We have had some of the worst leadership of any organization in the last 2,000 years. If the Church depended on human instruments it would've gone the way of Enron and Arthur Andersen and any other failed corporation long ago. It would've ended like many other failed nation-states long ago. Study the history of our church and this is not the worst scandal of the last 2,000 years. It is the worst scandal of the last 100 years; it's not the worst of the last 2,000 years. And if you study history, you will see that we have had some terrible popes; we've had some terrible bishops; we've had some horrible clergy. The Church has endured not because it's founded and guided by human instruments. Christ's divine presence works through the cracks of what St. Paul calls "earthenware vessels" or broken pots.

Father Ron Rolheiser called to our attention recently some writings from an Italian monk. He died in 1988 his name was Carol Carretto. His words are instructive to all of us:

"How much I criticize you my Church and yet how much I love you. How you have made me suffer so much and yet I owe so much to you. I should like to see you destroyed and yet I need your presence. You have given me much scandal and yet you alone have made me understand holiness. Never in this world have I seen anything more obscurantist, more compromised, more false and yet never in this world have I touched anything more pure, more generous and more beautiful. Many times I felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face and yet how often have I prayed that I might die in your sure arms. No, I cannot be free of you for I am one with you even though not completely you. Then too, where would I go, to build another church? But I cannot build another without the same defects for they are my own defects I bear within me. And again, if I would build another church it would be my church and no longer Christ's Church. No, I am old enough to know that I am no better than others. I shall not leave this Church founded on so frail a rock because I should be founding another one on an even frailer rock, myself. And then what do rocks matter? What matters is Christ's promise. What matters is the cement that binds the rock into one, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit alone can build the Church with stones as ill hewn as we."

What wisdom in Father Carretto's remarks; this Italian saint? Father Rolheiser continued his remarks and added on his own, "To the scandalized it can be a challenge to not miss the forest for the trees. Do not miss seeing that in the Church, frailty and sin—while real, tragic and scandalous—never eclipse the superabundant life giving grace of God."

That's what I pray for for myself and for all of us, that we not miss the forest through the trees. In the horrendous scandal that was revealed with the Pennsylvania report, they said as many as 7% of the priests in Pennsylvania were abusers. 7%. All other reports have said the scandals are more

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like 2 to 3% but let's say it is 7%. That means that 93% of the Church's priests were faithful. 93% in any book is in A. Do we throw out the baby with the bathwater because 7% or 3% or whatever it was broke their vows and scandalized us? Do we walk away from the Church because 5% or 6% or 7% or whatever percent of the bishops failed us when at least 90% have tried to do the right thing?

Perhaps you are angry at this abuse and I am angry at this abuse; angry at this scandal; angry at the failure of our Church's leadership. But I'm also angry at the disproportionate amount of news time that the media gives to the scandals within the Church as if the scandals were only inside the Catholic Church and didn't happen anywhere else. I'm angry at the fact that the lawyers don't go after abusing fathers or grandfathers who abuse their children and they go after the deep pockets of the Catholic Church and they sanctimoniously get up in front of the pulpit and say we gotta protect our children but why are they only going after deep pockets and if the people don't have money then they're not interested in the litigation?

I'm angry at Attorney Generals who would set aside their own institutions of their states within the schools where the scandals happen and they won't open the records of the schools but they're more than willing to subpoena the records of the Catholic Church.

There is injustice here and there's lots of blame to go around but this homily is not about blame. It's about praying for healing for our Church and we hear it in the context of Jesus saying, Blessed are you who are poor. Brothers and sisters, our poverty has been exposed. Our weakness has been exposed. Let's pray in the midst of this that we draw closer to Jesus not farther apart; that we are a humbler Church; that we not idealize somebody that stands at the pulpit or the altar or has a miter on top of his head. We are human beings just like you—gifted in some ways and terribly broken in others.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has invited us into a healing novena. It began last Friday night at the seminary and it concludes on Sunday with a special mass that Cardinal Cupich is praying down at the Cathedral and it will be traveling for nine days throughout different parts of the Archdiocese gathering our people together and praying. I invite you to kneel and to pray with me for the healing of our church:

NOVENA FOR THE HEALING OF OUR CHURCH

www.USML.EDU/HEALINGNOVENA

Pray this novena daily for nine days with an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be.

Loving God, turn your ear to the cries of your sons and daughters who seek healing for Your Church.

We are heartbroken. We are bruised. We are hurting.

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In these days we again wrestle with understanding the heinous acts of abuse by those entrusted with shepherding Your flock.

Ease our troubled hearts. Mend our broken spirits. Be “ever present in our distress.”

Merciful Lord, send your Healing Spirit to our brothers and sisters who have endured pain and abuse physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Comfort their weary spirits. Soothe their pain. Grant them justice.

May our eyes be opened to see your image in these wounded members of Your Church.

Shepherd of Souls, make your presence known to us that these wrongful acts will be addressed. Inspire our bishops and leaders of the Church to seek new and effective paths to keep safe the flock they shepherd.

Give us all courage to act and speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Rush the winds of the Spirit to scatter the darkness of sin. Pour forth Your healing Spirit to renew our trust and hope in You, who are our refuge and our strength.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Our Father

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth, as it is
in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy
womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father
and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning
is now, and ever shall be
world without end. Amen.