

Dear Brothers and Sisters



A few months after my ordination, Pope John Paul II announced his apostolic journey to the Holy Land in the Year 2000. I was able to be there when he celebrated Mass on the Mount of Beatitudes with 100,000 Christians. It was a real blessing for me, a newly ordained priest, to be able to be concelebrate Mass with the Pope, and future Saint John Paul II.

The night before the Mass there was torrential rain, and gale force winds. But that morning the skies cleared and the sun came out.

We sat on the Mount of the Beatitudes, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, and Saint John Paul II preached on the Gospel of the Sermon on the Mount, i.e., the Beatitudes - the same Gospel we will hear at Mass today - the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

I can still hear his voice ringing out over the sea of pilgrims who had travelled from every corner of the earth.

We were on the mountain where Jesus had first spoken the words to his disciples.

“Blessed are you, all you who are poor in spirit, gentle and merciful, you who mourn, who care for what is right, who are pure in heart, who make peace, you who are persecuted! Blessed are you!”

Pope Saint John Paul commented in this way...

“But the words of Jesus may seem strange. It is strange that Jesus exalts those whom the world generally regards as weak. He says to them, “Blessed are you who seem to be losers, because you are the true winners: the kingdom of heaven is yours!” Spoken by him who is “gentle and humble in heart” (Mt11:29), these words present a challenge which demands a deep and abiding metanoia of the spirit, a great change of heart.

You will understand why this change of heart is necessary! Because you are aware of another voice within you and all around you, a contradictory voice. It is a voice which says, “Blessed are the proud and violent, those who prosper at any cost, who are unscrupulous, pitiless, devious, who make war not peace, and persecute those who stand in their way”. And this voice seems to make sense in a world where the violent often triumph and the devious seem to succeed. “Yes”, says the voice of evil, “they are the ones who win. Happy are they!”

Jesus offers a very different message. Not far from this very place Jesus called his first disciples, as he calls you now. His call has always demanded a choice between the two voices competing for your hearts even now on this hill, the choice between good and evil, between life and death. Which voice will the young people of the twenty-first century choose to follow? To put your faith in Jesus means choosing to believe what he says, no matter how strange it may seem, and choosing to reject the claims of evil, no matter how sensible or attractive they may seem.”

We will listen to the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel at Mass today.

May we choose to believe Jesus’ word, no matter how strange it may seem.

May we reject the claims of evil, no matter how attractive they may seem.

Fr. Sean