12 Homily for the Fourth Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

29 January 2017

Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13; 1 Cor 1:26-31; Mt 5:1-12

What do the words “poor in spirit” mean to us today? Sometimes these words of Jesus could baffle us. But this is the measuring rod Christ seems to use to measure our worthiness to be the heirs of that great promise, namely to the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven. When one really gets into the core meaning of “poor in spirit”, it could easily be summed up by one word – humility. If we transmigrate ourselves in time and place in the first century world, it wasn’t considered a virtue to be aspired to or desired in the Greco-Roman milieu. Humility was something that was scorned and ridiculed by the people of the ancient world. To be humble was to be weak and feeble. That is why according to St Paul this great Christian virtue was misunderstood by the ancient philosophers. But St Paul admonishes Corinthians to believe that the “'wise” are those whom the world thinks common, ordinary and detestable.

In the Gospel today Jesus delineates what humility truly is when he pronounces blessed. Christ teaches us that the blessedness in the eyes of the Lord is found in those gentlefolk, in mourners, in those moved at the plight of the oppressed, in the innocent of heart, in those who love peace and work for peace, and so on. For Jesus, this is simply being faithful to His calling and mission. Christian humility will be a life that is strikingly marked by love and mercy rather than retribution; fortitude even under persecution; meekness and the resolute search for peace and justice made possible by innocence of heart.

The beatitudes, therefore, become the fundamental pillars that demonstrate a Christian who lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus certainly reflected that in everything that he said and did. At the heart of this humility lies the incessant effort to comfort others and a readiness to pay any price for the dignity of others. This is the humility that gets our hands dirty, makes us get down on hands and knees if need be, so that others can stand tall. It makes us denounce any evil structure so that our fellow brothers and sisters are restored to the innate God-given human dignity. The life that hails beatitudes through humility tells us that it is a life modelled after the cross and leads to the resurrection of Christ. The beatitudes assure us that as we share in His Passion, so too shall we share in His resurrection to eternal life.