**OT 4 A Lectionary Catechesis**

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| With today’s readings, we begin the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) It is the first of the five great proclamations of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel, and is the beginning of Discipleship 1.0. When Jesus speaks of the reign of God, he names its characteristics and results for people here in the Beatitudes. The lectionary does not finish the Sermon on the Mount because Lent begins on March 1, Ash Wednesday. Commentaries on the Beatitudes abound. In this first teaching on discipleship, the overall focus is on the diminishment and erasure of the self. The Greek verb σμικροζω means “to make one’s self small”. In a society of inflated egos, Jesus presents an enormous challenge. Jesus emptied himself of his divinity to become human, and even of our humanity be dying on the cross as a criminal. To make one’s self small is also to move to the margins and to dwell in the company of the “small.” Jesus often refers to these “little ones”, and not all time about children.  |

**FIRST READING: Zephaniah 2, 3. 3, 12-13**

Zephaniah prophesizes between the reign of good King Josiah and the Assyrian capture of Jerusalem in 587 BC. He relentlessly denounces the worship of false gods and the corrupt political leadership of Judah. In our widely separated verses of the reading, Zephaniah addresses the “humble of heart” and the “remnant”, a people humble and lowly, the “anawim” who were historically discarded by the Assyrian and Babylonian conquerors. These verses are paired with the gospel, reminding us of the deep roots of Jesus’ teaching in the prophetic tradition which sees that God is on the side of the poor. The “lowly ones” are the “blessed ones,” in the reign of God. One of new American saints is celebrated on January 23, St Marianne Cope, and on January 22, Roe vs. Wade is remembered and protested.

**Vs. 3: CCC 64, 711, 716** “Through the prophets, God forms his people.” They are the poor who bear

 among them hope in God’s saving work. The rich do not hope because they think they already have everything. The first citation from the CCC lists only the holy women who are poor and bear this hope. The proclamations and of the prophets converge in the poor of Israel. God is at work making all things

new (Is. 43, 19 and Rev 21, 5). The last citation speaks of the fruit of the Holy Spirit among the people of the poor.

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | Who are the ”lowly ones”, “the remnant” in Church and society today?Why does God have a preferential option for the poor? |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | Do you see any modern relationships or connections with the politics of Zephaniah’s time?How does one live in a world were many things are accessible and still think of one’s self as a “lowly one?” |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Why is it so tempting to believe in “money” and not in God? Same for technology. How do the words and context of Zephaniah address your life? |
| **WORSHIP** | What is the relationship between humility and worship?When our faith community gathers for worship, in what was are we “a remnant?” |

  **First Reading**

**RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 146, 6-7. 8-9. 9-10**

The last six psalms are hymns of praise, worship, and thanksgiving to almighty God, who “raises up the poor who are bowed down,” as arguably the central verse connecting the psalm to the Beatitudes. The way of the wicked, God thwarts. Yet don’t we think that can get away with things because God is slow to act?

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | What is the contemporary U.S. bishop’s stand on “the resident alien” in immigration law?Why does the Church take up issues of political and social justice and make statements about these things? |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | Who helps you make it through the day and direct your life?In what things have your “kept faith forever”? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | What part of this psalm would you like to share with your family?What part of this psalm invites you to engage in social justice work? |
| **WORSHIP** | Do you see the connections between this psalm and the *Magnificat* (Luke 1, 46 ff.)?Share how this psalm is an act of praise and worship. |

 **Responsorial Psalm**

**SECOND READING: I Corinthians 1, 26-31**

God choose those lacking wisdom of human standards, those without power, without good breeding, the weak, lowly, despised, so that “whoever boast, should boast in the Lord. In other words, God works through those who do not take credit for their own accomplishments because in fact they can’t, but rather God seeks our love for God’s self in our conversion through worship and praise. The emphasis of this spiritual progress of the soul (righteousness, sanctification, redemption) is not on our human work and effort, but entirely on what God does.

**Vs. 27: CCC 489** The CCC here points out Mary is the pre-eminent lowly one of God and points us to

 her lineage in a long line of Holy Women from the Old Testament.

**Vs. 30: CCC 2813** Here this verse is particularly relevant to understanding our baptism in Christ as a cleansing and call to holiness of life, brought about through our sanctification in Christ.

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | Vs. 30 stresses that “it is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus? Who is “him” and why is it important that we understand “he” moves first for our faith?Share what is meant by these three terms: righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | What is your own calling?Where do you stand in the esteem of the world? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | How do you share “holiness of life?”What is altruism? |
| **WORSHIP** | Compare and contrast human and divine standards.When does “boasting in the Lord” and worship intersect at the Eucharist? |

 **Second Reading**

**GOSPEL: Matthew 5, 1-12a Beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: The Beatitudes**

There’s a lot of writing about “blessed” really means “happy”. Originally it referenced the divine state of Greek divinities, only later applied to heroes, and later becoming a Greek greeting. It is not what Aristotle means by happiness in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he uses a completely different word. This word here is more likely used to indicate the human person’s share already occurring in the Messianic reign. The “poor in Spirit” are the “*anawim*/remnant” of Zephaniah. Blessings and happiness do not clash with American values, but the objects of this happiness do. In other words, meek, merciful, purity and the like are not American values. This is where the discussion should be. Is Christianity and discipleship just the proverbial nice idea that has never been tried, as Gandhi said? Read paragraphs 54-58 of Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation *Gaudium Evangelii,* to connect the dots. The Beatitudes raise the religious bar, so to speak and are challenging.

**Vs. 1: CCC 581** The Beatitudes are given by Jesus as “rabbi,” one with authority; he comes and teaches

as well in the prophetic tradition. The Beatitudes are a new statement of the Law of Moses.

**Vss. 3-12: CCC 1716** The Catechism calls the Beatitudes the heart of Jesus’ teaching, and prints them out here in full.

**Vs. 3: CCC 544, 2546** The first citation links the first reading and the Beatitudes explicitly. In the second

citation, the catechism points out the Beatitudes give order to the Christian life.

**Vs. 8L CCC 1729, 2518** God places the desire for happiness in the human heart so that we seek God. This observation is part of the catechism on the 10th Commandment.

**Vs. 9: CCC 2305, 2330** Commenting on the 5th Commandment, in which our peace is the peace and fruit of Christ. “By the blood of his cross . . . he reconciled men (sic) with God.”

**Vss. 11-`2: CCC 520** The “mystery” of Christ’s life is that his poverty if our model for discipleship.

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | Why are the Beatitudes the new commandments of the new covenant in Christ?Why are the Beatitudes the first thing Jesus tells his new disciples in this sermon?Why does Jesus include persecution at the end of the Beatitudes? |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | Why does the Catechism print out the Beatitudes in full?Chose one beatitude and share how living that one for you is both a blessings and source of happiness. |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Have you shared your Catholic joy and blessings with others?Which Beatitude do you see as most important for our culture today and why?  |
| **WORSHIP** | What do you think it means that Jesus sits on a mountaintop for this teaching?How does the joy of disciple show itself in Eucharistic Assembly?  |

 **Gospel**

**Next Sunday: OT 5 A: Isaiah 58, 7-10; Psalm 112; I Corinthians 2, 1-5; Matthew 5, 13-16**