

SEPTEMBER 11 2025 MSGR. ROBERT NUSCA

Today we find Our Lord presenting some of His key teachings on discipleship. And as we have just heard, Jesus calls upon those who would be His followers, to love their enemies, to be merciful, to refrain from judging others, to forgive and to give generously to others who are in need expecting nothing in return.

And as Jesus instructs His disciples regarding the values of the Kingdom (in the presence of large crowds), ultimately, He challenges all of us to a radical reordering of our priorities. For the arrival of the Kingdom of God is destined to usher in a great reversal, as the values of the Kingdom overturn the values of this passing world. And several things emerge for our reflection.

First of all, it is worth noting that this Gospel is taken from St. Luke's so-called "Sermon on the Plain." Here Luke presents a more concise version of Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, found in the Gospel of Matthew. While in Matthew Jesus addresses His followers from a mountain, here in Luke He is standing on a plain or "level place." But beyond the basic difference with regard to the setting are the differences with regard to emphasis.

Matthew Chapter 5 contains 9 blessings or Beatitudes, with the blessings being somewhat more spiritual in tone. Jesus says Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. While in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus speaks of four blessings, which are more focused upon concrete realities and social justice. As we heard in yesterday's Gospel, Jesus says: blessed are the poor, blessed are those who are hungry, those who weep, and those who suffer persecution. Moreover, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus pronounces a series of four woes that directly correspond to the blessings.

Woe to those who are rich, woe to those who are well-fed, to those who laugh, and to those who are well-spoken of in this world. Far from criticizing human expressions of happiness and joy, Jesus is warning against a self-indulgent attitude that seeks worldly pleasures without considering the needs of others. For what this world considers to be desirable may ultimately be condemned by God. So it is, that (again) in these teachings Jesus underscores a radical reversal of the values of this world.

Here, an early Christian theologian Origen speaks of the importance of our striving not only to pray and to live the spiritual life, but to imitate God Himself. He comments that: we demonstrate to others traces of God's divine image that is within us through temperance, courage, wisdom, discipline. And when we are merciful toward others, we imitate God Himself, and are truly children of God.

And so, we see how Our Lord's teachings lead us to reflect upon what has been referred to as the Gospel's "logic of reversal." For again, Jesus makes it clear that the first will be last, the last will be first, the poor will be rich, the rich will be poor. Taken together, Our Lord is drawing our attention to the truth that the new community of believers who follow Him and His teachings is destined to be "out of sync" with the prevailing attitudes of this world, as the commentators do well to point out. Secondly, it follows that, given the great gulf between the values of the Kingdom and the values of the world, the teachings of the Gospel in a real sense provoke a kind of crisis for whoever would follow Jesus. Now the word "crisis" comes from the ancient Greek word meaning "judgment," "decision" but also "turning point." We could say that the arrival of Christ represents a crisis in the sense of it being 'a decisive moment,' again, a turning point, as Our Lord calls us to strive to follow Him without delay, and to live the values of the Gospel to the full.

This was certainly the case for the earliest disciples who, upon being called on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, left everything behind

immediately, in order to follow Jesus. Ultimately, as Jesus teaches elsewhere, the call to true discipleship involves following the way of the Cross. In his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks in terms of a process of leaving behind or “casting off” our old, sinful self, our egotistical ways of doing things, and of putting on our new self through the power of the Holy Spirit so as to become even now, a new creation in Christ.

For when Jesus arrives, there is no turning back. He shows us how it is that through His life and ministry that God wants to take His proper place at the very center of our lives. Again, we see this so clearly in the examples of St. Peter and the earliest disciples, and indeed, throughout the history of Christianity in the lives of the Saints. Taken together, Our Lord’s teachings convey a genuine sense of urgency. So it is that Jesus teaches His followers not to delay in preparing, not to become distracted in the life of faith, and to avoid being caught off guard.

Jesus calls us to live in a spirit of watchfulness, wakefulness and vigilance as we follow the narrow path that leads to everlasting life.

Throughout Jesus is saying to all of us: ‘prepare right now for the arrival of God’s Kingdom. Be wise. Know what is truly important, have your priorities in order, don’t become lost on the way’ for again, your everlasting destiny is at stake. Never neglect your progress in the spiritual life. Pray always, prepare diligently every day for the return of Christ and the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

At the same time, let us all do our own our part to help the growing numbers poor, the lost, the lonely and abandoned of our society. In this we imitate Jesus Himself, who during His earthly ministry reached out to comfort the sick, the lost, the lonely, the abandoned and all who were most in need of God’s loving mercy.

Finally, today’s Gospel presents us with a very relevant message for our own time, when the values of the Gospel contrast so strongly with the

values of the world. In addition to loving our enemies – which St. Clement of Alexandria regards one of the marks of Christian perfection – let us give brave witness to the values of the Gospel before our increasingly globalized, post-human, post-truth world. For, as I have said on other occasions, there is a greater need than ever to give witness to the sanctity of human life from conception until natural death. During this Jubilee Year let us renew our commitment to give witness to a spirit of Christian Hope in an era marked by so much nihilism and despair. Let us give witness to the love of God and neighbour in an era marked by increasing violence and lack of regard for others. And in contradiction to the narcissism of our time, let us give witness to the power of the Cross in imitation of Jesus who teaches us how to always remain faithful to our “Yes” to the will of God the Father in our daily life.

And as we continue to celebrate this Mass during this Jubilee Year, let us remember as Pope Benedict XVI once observed: “On our own journey of life the risen Jesus remains our traveling companion “To rekindle in our hearts the warmth of faith & hope, and to break the Bread of eternal life.” Let us continue to encounter Our Lord through the regular reception of the Sacraments of Confession, and the Eucharist, as well as through Eucharistic Adoration and the life of prayer.

And as we encounter Jesus whole and entire in the Eucharist, let pray for the grace to recognize him when we encounter Him broken in the poor, in the growing numbers of people who are suffering the effects of food insecurity, and have need of shelter. For as St. John Chrysostom reminds us: ‘If you wish to honor the Body of Christ, then do not disdain Him when you see Him in rags...what God wants is not golden chalices but golden souls.’