

Homily: 4th Sunday: Cycle A: 2023: Zep 2: 3; 3:12-13; Ps. 146; 1Corth 1: 26-31; Mt 5:1-12

“The Life of Catholic Integrity”

We are all called by God to grow in holiness on a daily basis by living a life of Catholic integrity and character. All three readings today point to this reality.

1. **The Divine call to spiritual integrity** - God calls us to **integration** in our lives which means to bring everything together in proper order. Zephaniah gives us the pattern for this: *Seek the Lord, seek justice; seek humility, speak no lies. We are called to be obedient to God and all the teachings of our Catholic Faith; to be docile to the Holy Spirit and not be self-willed. If we do these things, then we will live in His peace and be a person of holy character.* This “down time” in the Winter months, when for many of us there is less busyness and outside activity than at other times of the year when the weather is nicer, is a good time to work on this call to integrity - to see which areas we need to improve in.
2. **Live in God’s peace and you shall not be disturbed.** The peace that comes from living in harmony with His will. **The secret of the saints** was they sought the right things in life; they had proper priorities: seeking God’s Truth and His holy will in all things and being willing to sacrifice all else to arrive at union with the Lord. The things that often distract us: our status in the world, our possessions, our money, our self-will, earthly pleasures - these things must be subjected to the light of God’s truth or we will not arrive at holiness, but will fall sadly short of the mark. **Money, prestige, social status, possessions will not get us into Heaven.** Most of us would admit that is true in our minds - but sadly in real life, we are often still focused on those things way too much! Remember God is not impressed by worldly glory - what matters to Him is seeing the image of Jesus in us; that we are persons of spiritual integrity and holiness. As St. John the Baptist put it so well, *“He must increase and I must decrease.”* We hear in St. Paul today the truth that *“God chose the foolish of this world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of this world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those*

who are something, so that no human being might boast before God.” That really flies in the face of our modern mentality which we are taught from the time we are little tykes- which is to “*be yourself and do what you desire to do in life; don’t let anybody stand in your way.*” Self-will and pride are seen as ultimate virtues. Jesus said the opposite: it’s only in losing our life for the sake of the Lord and His truth that we will ultimately find it. The path of self-will is ultimately the path to spiritual destruction. Are we praying daily to know and embrace God’s will?

3. **Jesus’s way is not our natural way!** To embrace His way to life, holiness and truth we have to change our way of thinking and acting. Hence He gives us **the Beatitudes** as guideposts to show us how to be persons of Christian integrity on the path to union with God. The 8 Beatitudes we hear today in the Gospel show us the dispositions of heart and mind that we need to embrace in order to become the holy people God calls us to be from our Baptism. *Detachment from worldly goods, sorrow over sin, growing in true humility and meekness; thirsting for holiness, being merciful, striving for purity of mind and body, in the gift of our sexuality and in being single heartedly focused on God; being a peacemaker, being willing to suffer for God’s truth out of love for Him.* All these things are part of living a life of spiritual integrity, i.e., of holiness. **Remember we must be willing to suffer with Jesus in order to reign with Him.** To follow the Beatitudes in daily life we will suffer in this world as He did; but remember it leads to ultimate life and joy in Heaven, as well as the grace of divine union and peace in our hearts now which is greater than any worldly pleasure or glory, as Jesus promises in the Gospel of John (**please read**: chapters 14-17). Now is a great time to ponder this reality and to change the things we need to change through **reflection, good spiritual reading, prayer, acts of penance, and works of generosity, kindness, and charity in relation to our fellow human beings,** so Christ can more fully live His life in us - to the greater honor and glory of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let’s ask the Lord for this special grace: *to daily become persons of greater integrity, character, and holiness in Christ,* for the glory of God and the salvation of souls: our own and others. God bless you.