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THE BEATITUDES

(Mt 5, 3-10)

Lecture delivered
at the Association
"I beati costruttori di pace"
("Blessed are the peacemakers")
Padova 2006 - Italy

*Transposition of an audio-recording **not reviewed by the author***

Note: *the transposition is liberal, incidental errors may be due to the difference between oral and written language and punctuation has been made by ear..*

The Beatitudes are the very unknown to Christians. Why this very central issue remains unknown to people? You know that one of the main criticisms made to religion is that of being "the opium of people", such as a drug that sends people to sleep and Christianity has been one of the first accused to be so; particularly the message of Beatitudes. Actually if one reads the Gospel, at least in translations from the past, reads "*Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who are persecuted, blessed are the starving...*", and one could say: are we kidding?

Maybe the person that wrote such things hadn't ever met poor people, or didn't know what sadness is, didn't know what hunger is; and why are those blessed?

In the past the answer was ready and simple: for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. What does this mean? They go to heaven, but poor people are poor, not stupid, so they could retort: "but also the rich go to heaven, or rather they go there faster than we do, they can pay for their Masses, so we are cheated twice".

For this reason Beatitudes have been the great failure of Jesus message; you know what happened in the past?

If those who were poor, afflicted, hungry, had the opportunity of changing their conditions, they obviously used to. Look, if you are not poor anymore you are not blessed anymore!

They would have answered: "I leave this blessing to you, my dear friend!"

On the other hand those who were not poor refrained from becoming poor, afflicted or hungry in order to be blessed. This was the failure of Jesus message that led to a great misunderstanding.

Almost everywhere, if you ask people how many are Moses commandments, all of them are aware that are 10; if you ask them to list them, there's a little confusion, but at the end all 10 are set out.

But these are the laws that Moses gave to Israel people, not the proposal that Jesus made to Christian communities.

We will acknowledge later on that for Matthew's Christian community, Beatitudes are the equivalent of Moses commandments. Well, you will barely

find people who know how many they are, but you will never find someone who is able to list them all.

The first one is quite well known as it is the most uncomfortable, and often there's a little confusion in the explanation. Beatitudes generally don't seem attractive for men inspiration.

But is it possible that Jesus proclaimed such insane messages? Is it possible that Jesus is the first accused for making religion "the opium of people"? This is not right.

Reading Beatitudes we will realize that they are all linked together, especially with the first one; we will see that **Jesus message is not the opium of people, but the adrenaline for people**. It is the one that spreads energy, vital power, able to change the society; that's why the last one speaks about persecution.

We will analyze the main guidelines of this text that is able, if well known, to enrich the faith, but is important also for the non-believer, as it has a great literary value, because evangelists were extraordinary theologians able to compete with world champions of literature.

We will examine Matthew's text; every evangelist has his own theological plan and is important, before reading a Gospel passage, to better understand the theological plan of the specific evangelist.

What does this mean that every evangelist has his own theological plan?

That all of them announce the same message, but with different formulas and models, depending on his particular theological stature, but first of all depending on the addressees of the message.

The author of Matthew's text speaks to a Judaic community who accepted Jesus as the Messiah they awaited, but only if His message was in line with the old tradition, or treaded Moses or Prophet Elia's footsteps.

The evangelist carries out a skilful literary and educational work in order to explain that, along the lines of Moses life, Jesus is greater.

What does the evangelist?

- At that time, Moses was considered the author of the first 5 books of the Bible, the one we know as Pentateuco, the first 5 books that complete the law; Matthew writes his work by dividing it in 5 parts.

Each of them ends with words similar to the ending of Moses books. So Matthew's Gospel is divided in 5 different parts.

- We all know Moses history, the extraordinary event that prevented him from the Pharaoh's command to kill all Jewish firstborns; this is why only in Matthew, not in the other authors, we find the episode of the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem, commanded by the new Pharaoh, which represents the man of the power. We only find this in Matthew because he wants to show us the equivalent.
- The other important moment in the life of Moses is when he goes on top of the mountain, the Sinai, and God promulgates his alliance with the people. Jesus in Matthew's Gospel goes on top of a mountain announcing the new alliance (please note that not God is announcing it, but Jesus, the so called *God with us*). Jesus has come to suggest a new relationship with God, completely different from the one of Judaic world. **Jesus has come to ferry people from the world of religion into the world of faith.** Which is the difference between the two? We say "religion" to indicate what men have to do for God; Jesus ends all this. With Jesus a new relationship with God begins, in which it doesn't matter what man does for God, but how he welcomes all what God makes for him. So Jesus proposal cannot be comprised in religion category, but in faith's one. **Jesus has come to suggest a new relationship with the Father, with God, which is any longer based on obedience to his law, but on welcoming and resemblance to His love.** It is very important that we understand this difference because in Judaism the believer was the one that obeyed God by observing His laws. If a law exists, it means that probably many people, due to their social, civil, religious, moral condition are not able to observe it, so they are discriminated as they cannot perform those actions that assure the relationships with God; so we are forced to catalogue them as "observers" or "non-observers". Jesus than came to change this relationship with the Father, we won't see anymore the believer that obeys God, observing His laws, but a believer that resemble the Father by practicing a love similar to His one. Obeying, observing the laws is not possible for everyone, but welcoming Father's love certainly

is. In the first category, the religious one, merit is in force, a man must deserve God's love, and this is not fair because there are people that, for their specific life condition, don't succeed in doing this; with Jesus the merit category ends up, God's love must not be deserved, but welcomed, as a gratuitous gift. This is the very new brought by Jesus and is explained by evangelists following their own literary models.

- Finally you know that Moses didn't succeed in entering the promised land, he died on the Nebo mountain. That is why Jesus, only in Matthew Gospel, ends his final action on a mountain. But, while in Deuteronomy we read Moses death and the need of giving a successor to guide people entering the promised land, Matthew's Gospel ends on a mountain, but is not a death scene, it's a scene of a life which is stronger than death. While Moses needed a successor, Jesus didn't. The last words of Jesus in this Gospel are "*I am with you always, until the end of the age*", which do not represent a deadline, but the very quality of His presence. Jesus is always present in His community.

So, let's start this episode; we saw that Moses goes on top of a mountain and announces the 10 commandments from God, intended to be only for Israel people.

The innovation brought by Jesus is that he went on top of a mountain, but He, not God, announces something new: the Beatitudes.

Beatitudes are a great literary masterpiece.

First of all also the number of Beatitudes is important: in Matthew's Gospel they are 8.

Why exactly this number?

In ancient Christianity it was a very important number, the figure that represented Christ Resurrection.

Jesus resuscitated the first day after the week, that is the eighth day: so the figure 8 represents the resurrection.

That's why the ancient baptistries used to have an octagonal shape; number 8 indicates an indestructible life.

Well then

- **While commandments' observance guaranteed a long life on earth,**
- **beatitudes acceptance guarantees already in this earth life a quality of indestructible life**

This is the reason why when Jesus talks about eternal life doesn't refer to it in a Judaic way. In Judaic world eternal life was the future reward to be obtained for a good behavior in the present.

Jesus talks about eternal life already in the present.

It is not a future reward, but an opportunity to be experimented right now. The one who welcomes the message of Jesus and practices it, will feel his inner energy and capacities being released, leading him to the final dimension.

The evangelist in fact calculates the number of beatitudes very precisely: 8, which means that by welcoming and practicing this message, a man gets a special and indestructible quality of life.

It might seem strange, but the evangelist calculates also the number of words to be used by composing the Beatitudes. In order to arrive to the desired amount, sometimes he inserts little superfluous words, to arrive exactly to 72.

Why 72?

Because, as per The Book of Genesis, the known pagan populations were represented by the figure 72, indicating the entire known universe, pagan world.

Do you remember that in the Gospel of Luke Jesus sends 72 disciples?

What does the evangelist mean by that?

Whereas commandments were for a single population, Israel, Beatitudes are for the entire mankind, all the people can welcome this message.

The first Beatitude has not been put at random; it is the premise for all the others and is the one that entails more difficulties. We know it very well, is the one of the poor, the most unpleasant.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them"
or literally, *"Blessed are the poor for the spirit, for to these belongs the kingdom of heaven"*

In Gospels Jesus NEVER said that poor are lucky, NEVER. So if we affirm that Jesus said that poor people are lucky, those people that society made poor, it is not true.

Jesus never declares that the poor are lucky. The poor are unfortunate and is responsibility of the Christian community to modify their poorness condition.

Why were we told that Jesus used to exalt poorness?

You know that one of the main problems that the Catholic Church has fronted was that Gospels were written in greek (the commercial language of that time), but in some decades that language wasn't the international language anylonger and in western world was supplanted by latin, in eastern area by syriac and in Africa by coptic: so there was the need of translating the text from the original language to spoken ones.

During the translation from greek into latin, many grammatical subtleties could not be maintained; furthermore the Church provided particular interpretations so that people was convinced that Jesus thought that the poor were lucky.

First of all let's find out what does **"blessed"** (μακάριος) really mean; it is repeated 8 times in the text.

In ancient times it used to mean **"the plain and total happiness"**, which was the jealous characteristic of divinities. In pagan world the gods had some exclusive rights, happiness, for example. When they realized that someone on earth was too happy, they used to hit him with a misfortune.

Well, Jesus invites to plain happiness a good 8 times. If religion promises an illusory happiness, the one in the next-life (if you suffer on earth you will be happy in the next-life), Jesus doesn't agree at all, he came to announce to people that it is possible to be totally happy here on earth.

Does it really matter being happy in the next-life if you suffer here? Jesus came to suggest a new relationship with God, but first of all a new kind of relationship with people around to make happiness possible and not limited, a plain happiness in the present existence.

God is not an enemy of happiness, God is the author of happiness and wants this happiness to be in every men's life.

Who are those proclaimed blessed by Jesus, (which means completely happy)?

"the poor in spirit", or "for the spirit".

So Jesus never says that poor are blessed, but "poor in spirit" are. The secret is to correctly understand what "poor in spirit" means.

Grammatically *"poor in spirit"* could mean:

- an individual deficiency: those who are lacking in spirit; but it doesn't seem possible that Jesus proclaims blessed the stupid ones, poor them. Those should be cared after by the Christian community, but I don't think that this might be the aspiration of the Christian community.
- *Poor in the spirit*, could refer to spiritual behavior; and this, strangely enough, has been the interpretation of the church. What does this mean? You remain rich, you maintain your properties, but it is important that you seem spiritually detached. I never understood how can a rich be spiritually detached from his riches. *"Poorness in the spirit"* became *"spirit of poorness"*. Rich were not asked to dismiss their richness, the important thing was to remain detached from it, maybe making some offerings every so often to church's religious charity... But as this is the most difficult Beatitude, it is the one to which Jesus refers many times in Matthew Gospel. When Jesus asks to the rich to renounce to his riches, the man refuses and goes away; Jesus doesn't run after him trying to take care of his requirements. He doesn't tell him "don't worry, keep all what you have, the important is that you remain spiritually detached". The detachment from riches must be immediate, real and radical. So Jesus doesn't ask for a spiritual detachment, but a real one.
- *"Poor for the spirit"*, involves an existential choice. We are not speaking of persons turned poor by the society turned poor, but of **persons that for the spirit, for the inner power, voluntarily chose to reach the condition of poverty.**

What does this mean?

At the end of Beatitudes people are a bit surprised and Jesus says: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets*, that are the two parts of the Old Testament, *I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them*. Jesus came to fully carry out God's project on mankind that Moses already expressed: among my people nobody must be needy. This is God will. You know that at that time every nation had its own divinity, but how could they realize which one was the true one, which God was the most important?

Israel challenge was the following: if no one will be in need, people will believe that the God of Israel is the true one.

That's why in the ancient community of Jerusalem, Luke writes, there were many witnesses of Jesus Resurrection. How come?

Not by catechism or proclamations, but for the fact that no one among them was poor. The only evidence that Christ resuscitated is that in the community there aren't those who have and those who don't have. In a community dinner no one is in need, this is the only evidence. Jesus came to fulfill this project, but for sure it is not easy. When you touch people's wallet, my dear men, this is an unpleasant subject.

In the Gospel of Luke, and it seems funny, Jesus is followed by a big crowd as he goes towards Jerusalem where they think they're going to conquer and divide the loot.

Jesus stops three times and says:

- Look, I'm going to Jerusalem to suffer (and we are ready to suffer with you)
- Maybe I'll be killed (and we are ready to be killed for you)
- Now, who doesn't sell all his properties, cannot follow me (no answer).

My dear Messiah, go to Jerusalem, as soon as you gain it, send us a postcard...

The crowd abandoned him.

When you touch financial interests.... This is so true that Christian communities have succeeded in changing even the Our Father Prayer. When Jesus teaches the Our Father and says: *and forgive us our trespasses, as*

we forgive those who trespass against us, he is not speaking of forgiveness, he is not speaking of something spiritual, but of something very concrete: the real cancellation of debts.

Why Jesus says this?

We said that the Lord, through Moses, taught us the hope, the ideal: nobody must be in need. At that time there was a law that expected that every 7 years all debts were cancelled. The law was a good one, but the real application even worsened the situation of the poor. Do you think that somebody would have ever lent some money near the expiration date of the 7th year? Who was that mad guy that lent money being not sure to have them returned? So, this law, made to favor the poor, turned against them. Jesus used the sense of that law, not intending to cancel debts every 7 years, but always, every single time, in order to make the community recognizable. Remit our debts... at that time we thought that men was in debt to the Lord for the creation, for the life, etc. in the same way as we cancel the debts of the others. But we are talking about financial debts as it is perhaps quite easier to forgive an offence than to cancel a debt, especially if it is a considerable one. This teaching has then been made a spiritual one.

What does Jesus suggest through this Beatitude? He suggests that all of us, freely, voluntarily, for the spirit (inner power), enter the category of the poor, not by adding ourselves to all the poor in the world (otherwise it is not useful). He doesn't want us to undress, but to dress the undressed, as for sure each of us can dress somebody without remaining naked. Jesus says that the word "poor" must be better understood and adapted to our culture, so we must **lower our life standard to allow the poor to raise theirs**. Just like Jesus who, as the New Testament teaches us, made himself poor in order to enrich the poor, the Lord wants everyone to enter the category of lords, but not that of rich.

Jesus is very severe with rich, in fact he says that no rich will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Why?

What does "entering the category of lords" mean? The lord is one who gives, and all of us can do this. Giving doesn't depend on health, culture or

on what one owns. All of us are called to be lord, Jesus invites us to be so. Who is the rich then?

He is the one that has wealth and keeps it for himself.

In Jesus mind there is no place for rich in his community because Jesus' community is composed by lords, but for sure not by the rich. At that time poor were called "the poor of Jahvè", because they believed that the Lord would have helped them to leave poverty; but with Jesus the contrary happens, there are people that trust Him so much to decide to enter poverty.

"Poor for the spirit" are those who freely, voluntarily, for love, feel responsible for others' happiness and well-being. If this really happens, then Jesus says *"these are blessed, for to these belongs the kingdom of heaven."*

And now we ask ourselves: is this spiritualized image of the next-life necessary?

No, Matthew is the only one who uses the formula "kingdom of heaven"; it doesn't exist in the texts of other evangelists.

The other talk about "God's kingdom". Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" because he speaks to Judeans and they used to avoid telling or writing the name of God. In order not to annoy their feelings, he replaces the word "God" with "heaven".

We do this too, but we are not aware of. We are used to say "thanks heavens", but we are not thanking the atmosphere, we are thanking God. Or sometimes we say: "heaven forbid", meaning God.

So "kingdom of heaven" is not the next-life, but God's Kingdom. What does "God's Kingdom" mean?

Israel came from the experience of monarchy; God didn't want monarchy, because He didn't want a man to command other men, but Israel did want it, even if God was against it. And God, through prophets says: look, your kings will take your sons to turn them into warriors, your daughters to turn them into slaves, they will take away your best lands... We don't care, we want a king just like other people!

This was the beginning of Israel's misfortune. The worst kings followed each other, bringing the people to civil wars in between different reigns;

and neighbor powers occupied and assimilated the whole Israel. This led to a vision of an ideal God that would have taken care of poor and outcasts. By saying "*to these belongs the kingdom of heaven*" is just like saying that God was their king, but God doesn't rule by issuing laws to be respected by people, but by communicating His own Spirit.

So this first Beatitude, that contains a verb in the present tense, doesn't mean that "to these will belong...", but "belongs"; it is something immediate.

Jesus says: where there is a group - not an individual: Beatitudes are not addressed to an individual but to a group of individuals.

Why does he use the plural?

He doesn't need a single person to do this, because he wants to affect the entire society, he needs the group, the community to do this.

Well then, Jesus assures this: if there's a group of people, today, immediately, who chooses freely, voluntarily, for love, to feel responsible for others' happiness and well-being, since that very moment something extraordinary happens, God takes care of them; it's a fantastic exchange. If we take care of others, we finally allow God to take care of us.

And what happens next?

We start to really feel God as a Father: there's a great difference. When you ask Christians if they believe that God is our Father, they say yes. But if you ask them "did you experiment his fatherhood in your life?" they are not able to answer. It's Christians' tragedy; they told us that God is Father - and this is true - but they don't teach us to live Him as Father. The only way to really feel He's our Father is by taking care of others' happiness and, since that very moment He will take care of ours; and our life will change, because we will experiment his tender presence in every insignificant aspect of our existence. We can hear Him whispering "don't worry, trust me".

This doesn't mean that we won't have troubles anymore, but we will have a new power, a new ability in facing them.

So this is the First Beatitude, Jesus is very frank.

Those who, immediately, freely, voluntarily for love, decide to be responsible for others' happiness, those are blessed because God will take care of them. (this is the very sense of the kingdom of heaven).

If this exists, all other Beatitudes naturally follow, as they derive from the first.

The first has its verb at the present tense, all other, apart from the last one, have their verbs at the future tense.

In other Beatitudes the evangelist first introduces negative human situations, suggesting that every community that already chose to follow the first Beatitude, will have to eliminate.

The first of these negative situations for mankind is:

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"

Jesus seems stating that afflicted or oppressed (the Greek word *πενθοῦντες* can be translated in both ways) are blessed, for they shall be comforted. Here also this doesn't mean that all unfortunates in the world will be comforted in the next-life. Who among those who suffer and cry in this very moment cares if he will be comforted in the next-life? And Jesus doesn't speak of comfort, but of consolation, which is a different concept.

You certainly read the Book of Job. We find a pious man who has all the troubles in the world: he has his lands burst into flames, he has his livestock killed, his sons dies, his house collapses, his wife survives...

Well then, three friends go and visit him, three pious persons, who are the most dangerous to meet when you're in troubles... You know what Job says?

I had many misfortunes, but they were less terrible than your visit is, because you came to comfort me using the same words I would have used with yourself.

Jesus doesn't talk about any distress, any sadness, but the evangelist utilizes the expression you find in Isaiah, ch. 61 where he declares that the day the Messiah comes he will console all those who are afflicted. We are not talking about any kind of distress, a difficult relationship with another person, a painful situation; the afflicted Isaiah refers to, are people oppressed by two different realities that worsen the situation:

1. Externally, a pagan domination
2. Internally, the oppression by religious leaders

In fact in the Gospel of Luke this same Beatitude is translated as *"Blessed are ye that weep"*: we are not talking about depressed persons, but persons who are overwhelmed by a political, economic or social situation, who are not able to shout out their despair.

So Jesus doesn't proclaim that afflicted people are blessed, He says that those who live this situation, those that society has overwhelmed for economic, political, social, religious reasons, are blessed for they will be not **comforted** (ἐνισχύω), BUT **consoled** (παρακαλέω), which means that **the causes of their suffering will be eliminated to the root**.

All other Beatitudes derive from the first; if there is a group of people that starts caring of those who suffer, of those who suffer to such an extent that are not able to shout out their despair, those are blessed because, thanks to the Christian community, they will see the end of their pains.

Therefore this is a message for today, it is not for the next-life. There are so many people crying and waiting for our commitment... we are the one who are in charge of ending their suffering. Only by doing so, they can be called "blessed".

Next Beatitude is a bit difficult to understand, as it seems not to have a precise relationships between the negative situation at the beginning and the promise at the end.

We saw that the afflicted will be consoled, then we will see that those who hunger will be filled, but the present one says:

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth"

What's got to do the earth with the meek, it's not clearly understandable. In the past we didn't have the tools to study on this. Until about 40 years ago the New Testament in Greek was not available. The Church came back to the Greek text with the Second Vatican Council; the first edition of the Greek New Testament dates back to 1975. So the experts were not able to better comprehend this Beatitude, as in the past the earth changed his meaning into the next-life, there was the myth of paradise, the mild were those who submitted to church leaders, and so on.

Let's go back to Matthew who, also in this case, goes back to the history of Israel, by citing Psalm 37,11.

In the history of Israel, when people entered Canaan land, land was divided according to tribes, each tribe divided it according to clans, each clan divided it according to families, so that each family could get one plot.

Land is important in the Eastern world; a man without land is a man with no dignity, and by saying this we understand all the issue of Palestinians whom land was confiscated, because land is life. If a man is a landowner he can work and can feed and maintain his family; if he isn't, he cannot.

But, after the subdivision, within two or three generations, the most arrogant, the most astute, the most dishonest stole the land of the less capable and astute. The result was that most part of lands was owned by few families and people was forced to work as day labourers in a land that used to belong to them. A huge injustice! So these persons protested and, in order to calm them down, some persons, pious persons (in difficult situations keep your distance from pious persons, they are the most dangerous!) came and pray the Psalm 37 which delivers a panegyric by saying: no, don't get annoyed with rich as you don't know how much they suffer, poor them; stay calm and quiet (here comes religion = opium of people!) because you will inherit the land; that is to say, stay calm, let God do, He will distribute land with justice and the rich will suffer while you will get a piece of land. This is Psalm 37.

In the text of the Beatitude "meek" doesn't indicate a moral quality of an individual, but a desperate social condition; there's the same difference between the word "humble" and "humiliated": here we are not talking about humbles but humiliated. For a better comprehension we may say "disinherited", those who have lost everything, maybe for their fault or inability. But Jesus says that the disinherited, those who have been dispossessed of everything, including their dignity, well, those are blessed because will inherit the earth (the definite article indicates the whole of it).

And you see we go back to the first Beatitude: if there is a community that feels responsible for the happiness of unhappies in the world, those who lost everything, who lost their honor, their human dignity, they will find

back the earth, non just a plot of land, but the earth, the whole of it. This means that in a community that lives the Beatitudes, those who are disinherited will find an extent of dignity they had never known before, because they will be loved.

As you notice, Beatitudes are not insane but on the contrary they involve all the unpaid that were existing at that time and continue to exist.

It's up to the Christian community to give life fullness to those people.

Beatitudes of afflicted and disinherited are summarized in a third one. Remember that there is always a precise scheme that the evangelist utilizes to deliver the Beatitudes. Next one is:

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"

The evangelists displayed two circumstances of injustice and summarizes them in a third one.

Those who think it is crucial to give back dignity to others, to free the oppressed from oppressors, well, in such a community (always deriving from the First Beatitude), where people gave up ambition, enrichment, overwhelming and understood that **happiness is in what you give and not in what you have**, well, those will be completely happy on the earth.

Apart from this Beatitude we find this concept also in Acts of Apostles (20,35b), a part of the Bible that is not given the prominence it deserves. Jesus says: *'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*, this is happiness.

Many are not happy because are persuaded that happiness consists of what others do for them. In this way they always turn disappointed because others are not able to know what they want them to do.

So Jesus says: No, happiness is not in what others do for you, what you receive from them, but is in what you give them. By doing so, happiness is full; maybe I don't know what others can do for me, but I know for sure what I can do for them.

Jesus invites us to a full happiness, where there is a community that takes care of others' happiness, that do hunger and thirst after righteousness,

those same people will be completely filled (here we should add in the translation a verb that is no longer in use χορτάζω, that we utilize for animals, meaning "satiated" at such extent to burst).

This is essential because this verb (to be replete, satisfied), is used by the evangelist in another very important episode, the one of sharing of loaves and fishes where *they all ate and were satisfied*. (Mt 14,20). The evangelist, by this literary technique (using this verb only in these two episodes) makes ourselves understood that **one can satisfy his hunger and thirst after righteousness by satisfying others' physical hunger**, but, above all, Jesus guarantees that in His community no injustice will ever exist.

It is for this reason that Jesus will suggest some few things that, unfortunately, remained unheard.

Jesus will address His disciples: Pay attention! Don't call any human being 'father' -- for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. And you must not let people call you 'masters' -- for you have only one master, the Anointed One (Christ).

Please note: in religious world the assigned to novices' training is called "father master"...

It's crazy! As if Jesus would have never spoken!

So Jesus took those precautions to avoid hierarchies and ranks in his community. He guarantees that all those who care of justice (if the community made this kind of choice), they are blessed, for they shall be fully filled.

Please remember that Matthew writes according to Moses's actions, who after having announced the commandments, proclaims a kind of acceptance creed of these commandments, called in Hebrew "shemà Israel" (Listen Israel!).

Matthew does the same: after having proclaimed the Beatitudes, he introduces the Our Father.

The Our Father is not a prayer, it is the formula of acceptance of Beatitudes, made in a prayer's shape, so much so that to each Beatitude corresponds a request in the Our Father.

In fact in the Our Father the first requests concern mankind and the kingdom and all the others concern the community; the same happens in Beatitudes.

To better explain:

- In the first part of Beatitudes we saw mankind suffering situations that Christian community has the duty to eliminate;
- Then we see the effects in the community itself.

And the first of the second part is:

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Pay attention, as the Beatitudes that we are discovering don't regard different categories of people: for example the merciful, the pure in heart or the peacemakers.

They are not different categories, these are all effects that happen in an individual who welcomes the first beatitude; so the one who chooses the first beatitude and freely decides to enter poverty to allow poor to leave it, he really becomes merciful, pure in heart and peacemaker.

The evangelist doesn't talk about good qualities of an individual, but shows characteristics that become recognizable.

The first one is *merciful*.

Merciful (ἐλεήμων) doesn't refer to a person who feels **merciful** feelings, but refers to a person that **works actively in order to help the others**.

Mercy is not a feeling, but a concrete action by which you can help others to leave a difficult situation.

So Jesus guarantees: merciful are those on whom you can always count; it is not a gesture of charity just once, but an usual attitude that makes a person recognizable; I know that that person is always ready and available for me.

Jesus says: the merciful, those who are always ready to help, those are blessed, as every time they will experience difficulties, will be helped by God through the community in turn.

This is the exchange: if we feel responsible for others' happiness, we allow God to feel the same for us; it's a wonderful exchange.

We don't know ourselves as God knows us, so the action that He takes for us will always exceed the help we give to others, and, this is essential, He will always give back much more than we expect.

In the Gospel of Mark there's a very beautiful image, often misunderstood. Jesus says "*With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more*". (Mk 4,24)?

What is this measure?

In the groceries (up to 30-40 years ago), products were sold unpacked. We used to ask for a centimeter of oil, 2 hectogrammes of flour, etc. and in order to quantify these products we utilized special containers called "measure". There was the one for flour that corresponded to 500 grams, this was the measure.

Jesus was talking about every days' things, and guarantees that the same measure you use, will be given back to you, so what we give to others, is not a waste, as we will get it back; God gives life to whom produces life, but God is unvincible in generosity, He always gives us back something more. For example, if I give 100, I don't get 100 back, but 130. And if I don't keep this 130 for myself, but I donate it to others, I get back 180. This means that love is a guarantee for the growth of an individual, the more we give, the more we grow inside.

That's why Jesus uses that expression: "*Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him*" (Mt 13,12). It seems to be a trade-union interpellance, but is not correctly understood. It seems not to be fair.

The verb "to have" (ἔχω) is a verb that expresses a result, as if I say "I have", is a result of an action. I have this jacket that was given to me, I have this book that was bought for me; so when Jesus says "whoever has will be given", we can make a comparison with the parable of the 4 plots of land, there is a seed that is able to bring fruits.

This is the meaning: to whom is able to produce will be given the ability to produce even more. Who understands the message of Jesus, and translates it in practice, the more he gives to others, the more he will be able to give.

The one who does not dedicate himself to others, makes his loving ability fruitless, and when he will be in need of demonstrating his love, he won't be able to do it.

If I daily train my ability to overcome all inevitable disagreement in my family life or social life, when the time of offences comes, I will be able to forgive because I am well trained. But if I take badly every offence or disagreement, when I receive a big wrong, I won't be able to forgive.

Whoever has will be given more, who gives love will gain a greater ability to love, who doesn't give love, even what he has will be taken from him.

Jesus assures, and this changes your life, if you are known as persons that people can count on, you are blessed, because when you will be in need of, God will give you more than you have always given to others.

The other Beatitude, that has been completely misunderstood in the past is:

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

In the past purity was intended to be in genitals, not in the heart. Past generations were obsessed by purity, they thought they were controlled even in the bathroom by that triangle with the eye of God in it. Purity should always refer to that specific part of the body; that made them lose the real richness of this beatitude.

In Hebrew the word "heart" hadn't the same meaning as in our culture; the heart was not the place of feelings, but was intended as "mind", or much better as "conscience". When Gospel talks about a hard heart, it doesn't refer to a cruel person, but to an obstinate person. So, when Jesus talks about "pure in heart" means that those who are clear in their conscience, shall see God.

Also here the evangelist (you see that he recalls the Old Testament) - refers to Psalm 24,4 that used to consider purity in heart as a condition to go to the Temple and take part to liturgy.

Jesus talks about limpid persons, not as a quality of individuals, but as an attitude that makes them recognizable. When one chooses the First Beatitude, becomes a real person, in other words a transparent person.

So Jesus guarantees: limpid persons, real persons, those who say what they think, not double standard, those without a mask, those are blessed for they shall see God.

He doesn't talk about some kind of vision (be careful of visions or visionaries as today there are many...): if it happens that you have a vision, please check your blood pressure or go and see a doctor!

Jesus says that they will see God, not in the next-life, as everybody will see Him in the next-life, also those who were not pure in heart. Jesus assures they will see Him here, on earth.

The Greek verb "see" can be written in two different ways:

1. the first (βλέπω) indicates a physical sight
2. the other (ὁράω) indicates an intimate perception, a profound inner experience.

The evangelist doesn't mean that people will have a mystical vision of God, but wants to let us understand that all those who have chosen the First Beatitude, and are clear, transparent to others, God will be transparent to them, so they will be able to realize His presence, as a tender Father that takes care of every insignificant aspect of their lives.

In this way life changes. We believe that God exists, but when are we really able to experience Him? God exists, but where is He?

Well then, Jesus maintains that if we choose the First Beatitude and become limpid persons, we will be able to feel God's presence. God has such a great tenderness to turn everything into "good". He places himself at our service.

We are now to the Beatitude that gives the title to the lecture. We already said that all Beatitudes are linked one another and it's impossible to take one to the detriment of the others:

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"

First of all, let's analyze the words.

Jesus doesn't proclaim blessed those who are peaceable or re-conciliator, but the peacemakers (εἰρηνοποιοί).

Which is the difference?

- "peaceable" is a quality of an individual, is the one who cares of his own peace and avoids every conflict situation
- "conciliator" is a person that in order to guarantee others' peace may create conflict situations
- "peacemakers" are a pain in the neck, because those are ready to lose their own peace in order to guarantee the peace for others.

Who are these individuals?

The evangelist again doesn't speak of a quality of a person, but of an activity that makes him fully recognizable.

The word "peace" derives from the Hebrew "shalom"; this word is richer than our word "peace": real peace means all what makes men fully happy. God's project is that all men be happy.

I want to highlight this concept because people too often link God to unhappiness; there are many people who don't live positive moments of their lives with serenity, because think that if God realizes that they are happy, something bad will certainly happen!

This is a pagan image of divinity.

We are all heirs of the famous "valley of tears", the spiritual pool where all pious persons like to wallow.

This not the message of Jesus: He want's us to be fully happy here, it is really possible.

I met so many people engaged in voluntary activities who ask themselves "it is not a sacrifice for me, I do this with pleasure, is it praiseworthy? Is it valid?"

I always suggest them to wear a tight pair of shoes; maybe in this way they feel that their actions become praiseworthy...

If we look to old icons of Saints, they're not so cheerful, are they?

Have you ever seen a happy saint? Seeing a smily saint is very rare, they are always sad.

In Judaic theology we find that God worked for 6 days and rested the 7th. He created the world, the universe, and then men ruined it.

Jesus disagrees: when He didn't comply with the rule of Saturday, in John's Gospel He answers: *My Father works and so do I*. Creation is not ended.

In the Book of Genesis we find a total armony between man and woman, between man and creation, but it is not a regret for a lost paradise, it is the prophecy of a paradise to be achieved.

This is God will: He wants us to cooperate in creation. This is the very meaning of being "peacemakers".

The Beatitude says that those shall be called the children of God.

"Children of God" in Hebraic world has two different meanings:

1. the first is "to resemble to" (a son that resembles to God)
2. the second implies a kind of protection by God.

Jesus guarantees: those who are peacemakers, those who work for happiness, dignity and freedom of men, those are blessed as, first of all, they resemble to God.

If they resemble to God they act as God does. And secondly they are blessed as they have God on their side.

There's an expression in the Old Testament that we translate with all limits of our western mentality.

When Paul says that we are chosen to be adoptive children of God, we think as adoption as we see it in our western world, a gesture of generosity by which you welcome a child in your family; but the theologic meaning of being "adoptive children of God" is richer than this.

At that time, when a king or an emperor were almost to die, didn't leave the kingdom or the empire to a natural son, but chose one among their generals, the most capable, and adopted them as sons.

This is the meaning. God is so in love with mankind, that appoints us as His adoptive children, asking us to cooperate with Him and like Him in world and peace creation.

It's inevitable that, in order to create peace, we have to take it away to peace's enemies. When you work to favour the oppressed, you have to bother the oppressors.

We saw that all these Beatitudes have a future tense verb, because they are achievable if the First Beatitude exists, but the last one has the verb at present tense, just like the first:

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

You can notice that the second part of the First Beatitude and of the last one are identical, it's like a slap in the face. After all these Beatitudes one would expect an applause.

On the contrary, Jesus is very clear: those who are faithful to the entire programme, should not expect to receive an applause, should not expect to receive a recognition by civil or religious societies, but they should expect persecution.

What is very serious in the verb "persecute" (διώκω), used by the evangelist, is his precise meaning. This verb indicates a persecution made in the name of God, the worst one, because it is not inflicted by external enemies, but by those who were supposed to cooperate with you.

It happens that inside a Christian community there is always a group that is locked on a concept of an institution ruled by laws, instead of accepting Jesus proposal of a dynamic community guided by the Spirit. The first group will never accept the presence of prophets inside the community and will start persecuting them.

That's why Jesus will say: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you".

In the Last Beatitude, Jesus affirms that those who are faithful to His programme will be persecuted in the name of God. Those who were supposed to help, will fight against you.

In the Gospel of John Jesus will say: "in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God".

You know, one will never kill with such pleasure as when he kills in the name of God. So then, you will be persecuted but you are blessed as God is on your side: persecution for a believer and for a Christian community won't be a mark of defeat, but an opportunity for growth.

In a parable Jesus talks about a grain that falls in a rock land, *but the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died.*

The sun is essential for a plant; the plant doesn't wilt because of the sun, it's plant's fault, but because it didn't take deep roots. Jesus wants to

explain that there are people who welcome His message with enthusiasm, but as persecution comes, they collapse.

Persecution is a growth factor for the community, is like the sun on a plant, it makes it stronger; this doesn't mean that we have to look for persecutions, there are already enough, but Jesus tells us that by welcoming His message we will easily meet persecution. The certainty we have is that God is always on the side of persecuted.

Amongst the one who sentences in the name of God and the one who is condemned, God is always on the condemned's side. Perhaps this is the story of our church, that has been able to recognize saints, prophets, but quickly eliminated them. History goes by and those who have been sacrificed become real witnesses of the Lord.

For example, I want to cite Saint Therese of Avila, a very extraordinary woman.

She entered into an enclosed order, but she really lived Beatitudes, in complete armony with God, she felt that instruments provided by rules were not enough for her, she was willing to find a new way of acting. Well, her bishop wrote to the Holy Office: "In my diocese there is a nun, a restless and tramp woman". It was a wonderful portrait, wasn't it. Finally, the church gave her the title of Doctor of the Church, on the contrary we even don't remember the name of that bishop.

Poor bishop, he was right: my dear Therese, nuns have always become saint by following these rules, why did you want to change them?

Well then, men of Beatitudes find instruments of their time which are not enough and have to find new ones in order to make the communities really dynamic and ruled by the Spirit. The risk is becoming a stiff institution ruled by laws, with no narrow opening to the action of the Spirit.

How can we realize that our community is based on the Spirit?

There is a quick check that we can do: when we face a new proposal and say "Why changing? It has always been as it is", we are not making room for the Spirit, we run the risk of being persecutor and not persecuted.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.