

A few weeks ago, I enrolled in a gym. I intended to go there on days when it is too cold to go outside, like today, for my usual 45 minute walk. I also reasoned that my membership would allow me be inside for those walks when the weather turned hotter. If I really felt ambitious, I would begin doing workouts with elastic bands or weights.

I've been to that gym...twice...since I've enrolled. Two things come to mind as I share my experience with you. First, having a membership to a gym will not make me healthy. I can look at the gym app on my phone all day long. Of course, that won't do a darn thing to help strengthen my heart or lower my blood pressure. I will only become healthier the more regularly I go to the gym and actually work out. And second, perhaps in sharing my shortcomings with you, I will be motivated or re-energized to commit myself to do what will make me healthier. All this implies that I have to move from a passive lifestyle to something more active.

Today's gospel passage comes from the 5th chapter of St. Matthew. It is the famous listing of the Beatitudes. For many, the Beatitudes are somewhat passive – blessed are those who are poor, who mourn, who are persecuted. On the surface they seem to be saying something like this, “I’m sorry you’re poor, you’re experiencing loss, or folks are harassing you. Hang in there. God’s with you.”

But I'm pretty sure the Beatitudes mean something more. I've come to understand that the Beatitudes are more active than passive. Maybe the following re-interpretation might be in order.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

Money is nice. But it isn't the source of ultimate happiness. We are blessed, we experience God's contentment when we use what we have to help others. Amassing money isn't what brings blessing. Alleviating poverty and suffering is what brings peace to our hearts.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Of course we all experience loss. Of course all of us mourn. We mourn the loss of what we love. We are blessed, not because we're sad. We come to know happiness when we use the experience of our own loss or losses to walk with others who are suffering in the same way.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

A great peace settles upon our hearts when we show mercy to others. God is most present when we love the unlovable. When we forgive those who hurt us deeply. When we pray for those who seem to be our enemies and who seem to be working against us. When we show mercy, we decide not to invest in revenge or holding grudges. Rather, our energy and God's grace is better invested in loving those who don't love us back. And forgiving those who seem intent on harming our reputations.

Blessed are they who hunger or thirst for righteousness (which translates to seeking justice), for they will be satisfied.

We are blessed and know God's happiness when we seek to make right those things that are wrong. It's too easy to say, "well, that's just how things are. Not sure what I can do about that." Happiness, contentment, and God's blessings descend upon us when we actively seek to make life better for others. When we do the hard work of correcting an injustice. When we risk criticism from others for saying, "that thing, that action is just wrong. That thing or that action doesn't seem to align with how Christ taught us to act" despite how others might view us for professing that article of faith.

These examples of reframed beatitudes help us to understand that the Beatitudes aren't passive. We aren't blessed, content, or happy because of something pitiable that has happened to us. We are blessed, content, and happy because of how we act like Christ. We are blessed, content, and happy when we use our time, our talent, and our treasure to make life better for others. We are blessed, content, and happy when we live like Christ and connect with others as Christ connects with us.

Countless times I hear folks say, "I need to do more. I need to be more involved. But I don't know where to start." The way to start is to ***start***. You simply have to do something. Anything. And that simple step is what leads to change and directs us to a more blessed, contented, and happier life.

This weekend we are doing our in-pew effort for the diocesan Catholic Ministry Appeal or CMA. Many of you already received some information and a pledge envelope from the

diocese asking you to contribute to this appeal. Your gift to the CMA is a tangible step you can take to make life better for others. Your gift helps our school; it strengthens faith formation and youth ministry programs. Your gift is the single financial means for forming and educating our seminarians as they seek to become priests for our diocese. Your gift is what helps the unhoused find stability and a secure future in the workforce when they live at Pinellas Hope and Tampa Hope.

Giving to the Catholic Ministry Appeal is an active means to building the Kingdom of God in our midst, as Jesus called for. Often times we say, “I wish we had more priests to serve our parishes.” Or we say, “I wish those living on the streets could find more stability in their lives.” If you want those things to happen, take the active step of giving to the CMA.

I am so grateful to you for making a gift to the CMA last year. Your generosity helped us to just about make our goal of \$231,000. When every family gives to this appeal, we will make our goal and make the dream reflected in the Beatitudes a reality. I make the CMA part of my annual stewardship and giving, along with my monthly tithe to this parish. I am asking you to do what I do and to fulfill Jesus’ command to make the lives of others blessed and happy.

Right now, we’re going to take some time to fill out the CMA envelopes that are in front of you in the pews. I want each family to take one of those envelopes in your hands right now....