

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
29th January 2023 - 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: Zephaniah 2:3,3:12-13. Psalm 145. 2nd: 1 Cor 1:26-31. **Gospel:** Matthew 5:1-12a

I regularly speak of the **Beatitudes as Beautiful Attitudes**, and a moment's reflection on life and whatever is going on, how different it would all be if everyone did have a beautiful attitude towards each other. The readings for today correspond with those attitudes.

Zephaniah calls people to a humble attitude of seeking the Lord. This corresponds with the Beatitudes where Jesus presents a completely different approach to life from that of worldly security or power. In detail, the prophet, writing about the same time as Jeremiah, 630BC, shortly before the Exile, calls for a **continued search for God** among those who already give God their submission in obedience. This is helpful for those of us who are already committed but need to go on developing and growing in our faith. A **continued search for clean-heartedness, integrity and humility**.

Don't these ring in correspondence with *Blessed are the pure in heart and the meek and poor in spirit*
Integrity, we pray especially for all those set over us.

Honesty, which corresponds with purity of heart and hungering and thirsting for justice, which will be one of the characteristics of the People of God. Resulting from these attitudes and virtues will be **shelter** on the Day of the Lord, and **tranquillity** without trouble.

Many people are preparing to follow Christ more closely, or perhaps for the first time. I think of RCIA, Journey of Faith across the Catholic world; Zephaniah is speaking to them very specially. Together with the Sermon on the Mount, this reading is a sequel to last weeks calling of the Disciples and of ourselves to "get up and follow Jesus."

Here at the outset of the Journey of Faith, or its development and renewal, we are given a vision and a promise. Without any compromise, the teaching of Jesus flies up in the face of limited worldly values, putting down pride and dishonesty and power-mongering, enthroning in their place the uncomfortable values of humility, integrity, honesty and Trust in God.

What Zephaniah offers to those in Israel and to the Christian Church who remain faithful is some hope as we remain faithful in a hostile environment.

The Psalm (145), one of the Psalms of Praise, is the song of the lowly, the prayer of the poor. In the Divine Office it is entitled: **The happiness of those who put their trust in the Lord**, and with a subtitle from Arnobius, d 330 a Christian apologist at the time of the Diocletian persecution:
'*Let us praise the Lord all our days, that is in our conduct.*'

Among other occasions it is used at Morning Prayer in the Office for the Dead. It includes almost all the categories and groups of those for whom life is hard and painful.

If you have been associated in any way with people who suffer, then you will appreciate the beauty and trust expressed in the psalm. It holds up the Lord God as the faithful protector of those who put their trust in him. Notice the list:

The oppressed: the hungry: the prisoners: the blind: those who are bowed down: the homeless stranger: the vulnerable widows and orphans: the just. All these are very dear to God.

As are those Jesus mentions in the Beatitudes: **the poor: the gentle: the merciful: the pure of heart: the seekers of justice: the peacemakers: the persecuted: the mourners:** All are beloved of God because we/they put their trust in God.

The opening verse of the Psalm, which is not used in ours today, but is good to have on our lips:
My soul give praise to the Lord. I will praise the Lord all my days.