

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on February 14, 2010
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Liturgical Year C

Imagine for a moment you're going on a trip to a faraway, exotic country. How would you get ready? You'd probably get a guidebook. The guidebook would help you with the culture, language, and customs of a different world.

Now turn to Jesus' beatitudes and woes in today's Gospel. What is Jesus about here? Why is he talking about rich and poor, about hungry and full?

You might easily tell me those "blessed" and "woes" are about us. Maybe Jesus is telling us we need to be poor or hungry or unhappy.

If that's what Jesus is doing, he's pretty much wasting his time. Advice like that just makes us frustrated and guilty. Maybe I'd like to think it would be nice to be persecuted – but it's not too likely that I'll do much about it.

The beatitudes and woes as marching orders for my behavior don't make sense. Besides, Jesus never says I have to get poor or weepy or persecuted. He is describing – not prescribing. He's being a guide in a strange and new situation called "the kingdom of God".

If the beatitudes are not instructions for me, maybe they're about the world. Maybe we need poor, sad, persecuted people to bring out the best in all of us. But that, too, is just plain silly. Jesus knows how the world works. It doesn't look on the poor, sad, and persecuted with respect. As far as the world is concerned, these beatitudes make no sense at all.

The beatitudes we hear today are not about us. Nor are they about how to make the world better. The beatitudes are Jesus' guide to the kingdom of God. They are about who God is, who God blesses, what the world of God is like. They are Jesus' guidebook to the culture, nature, and values of the world of God.

Jesus is giving a picture of God. He does so, no doubt, in the hope that his picture of God will have some valuable impact on us. But – that's up to us.

What do these beatitudes say? They say God's values and God's priorities are quite different from the ones we operate by. Jesus is giving us a snapshot of life the way God lives it. In God's life, losers, insignificant players, and little people count a great deal.

We're not hearing a moral code today. We're not hearing a lesson in how to live in our world. The point of the beatitudes is to shed light for us on how God sees and on how God loves.

If God is really like that, what could it mean? It's a question well worth thinking about as another Lent approaches.