



Bible Study 4th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A

St. Maria Goretti and
St. Peter Claver
Parishes

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“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Mat. 5:11-12 NABRE

Reading I: Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

TOO BLESSED TO BE STRESSED! Stress is a product of modern society. We have opportunities for peace or anger, forgiveness or revenge. Such is the stress of life, but happiness is a choice. Giving in to anger or revenge is giving those negative emotions power over our happiness. We know that our duty as Christians is to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to bring the light of His love into places of darkness and hate. But what happens to that light of Christ when we are stressed. We should remember that the attitude of a disciple of Christ is that we are loved, saved, and sanctified by a mighty God. We are too blessed to be stressed by the little things of this world.

In the readings this Sunday, we see how important it is to have an attitude of being blessed in



the midst of trouble. Zephaniah, one of the twelve Minor Prophets, preached against the infidelity of the leaders of “the Chosen People” of Judah. He warned that the “*Day of Yahweh*” would come and both the pagan nations and rebellious Judah would be punished. But a faithful few, who were honest and truthful, would remain.

The first reading brings together two passages separated by one whole chapter. These passages advocate humility as the way to deal with the stress of captivity. Those who live in this way were “God’s Remnant”. Fidelity to God, truth, and justice were their qualities. Their lifestyle made them blessed in the midst of their exile and oppression. This concept of “God’s Remnant” is echoed in the Beatitudes in the Gospel reading. Those who humble their lives and depend on God are blessed by God Himself. They are too blessed to be stressed. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Are you faithful to God under stress? How do you remain faithful when confronting such obstacles?

Who Was Zephaniah?

ZEPHANIAH [zeff ah NIE ah] (the Lord has hidden) - is the name of four men in the Old Testament: 1. A son of Maaseiah (2 Kings 25:18; Jer 21:1; 29:25,29; 37:3). 2. A Levite of the family of Kohath (1 Chron 6:36). 3. The name is also that of an Old Testament prophet and the author of the Book of Zephaniah (Zeph 1:1). As God’s spokesman to the southern kingdom of Judah, Zephaniah began his ministry about 627 B.C., the same year as the great prophet Jeremiah. Zephaniah was a member of the royal house of Judah, since he traced his ancestry back to King Hezekiah. (Zeph 1:1 The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah.) He prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (641 B.C. - 609 B.C.). One theme of his message was that through His judgment God would preserve a remnant, a small group of people who would continue to serve as His faithful servants in the world (Zeph 3:8-13). 4. Father of Josiah (Zech 6:10). (From Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

TOO BLESSED TO BE STRESSED! If your life is a real mess, less stress can lead to true success. Perhaps this was St. Paul’s message to the Corinthians in this portion of his letter. Last week, we read St. Paul’s call for unity in Jesus Christ. The Corinthians were too sure of themselves and boasted of their wisdom. They stressed their knowledge as the way to holiness.

In these verses, he reminds them of: “*who they are, and whose they are.*” He told them never to forget that they were called by God out of their lowly human state (vv. 26-29). Their status in the world had nothing to do with their call by God to discipleship. God has chosen ordinary people – those who are “ordinary of heart.” God’s standards are the direct opposite of the world’s standards. So if they must boast about something, boast on what God has done. He told them that they were to be blessed to stress over such things. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What do you brag about? What has God done for you?

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12a

TOO BLESSED TO BE STRESSED! According to a December 2014 Pew Research Center report, money is the number one stress factor in the lives of Americans. In the meantime, the rich get richer and the poorer get poorer. Health concerns, employment, and personal relationships are additional stress points in this society. So how does a Christian manage these anxieties? The answer is in our attitude. The Christian must know that it is God's grace that sustains us, that empowers us, that protects us, that heals us. We are blessed. We just have to have an attitude of being blessed. Some say that attitude is more important than facts. Knowing that we are blessed relieves the stress of conforming to the world. We are too blessed to be stressed!

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus gives us the standard of conduct for discipleship. He describes the qualities and attitude that He expects His followers to possess in this life. Recall the Gospel of Matthew from last Sunday. Notice that the call of the four disciples was an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, the first of five great discourses by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

In the first two readings for this Sunday, meekness, poverty and the lowly state of God's people are contrasted with the wealth, power and wisdom of the worldly. St. Matthew gives what was commonly known as the Eight Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It is the attitude of knowing we are blessed. The Latin, *Beatus* or *Beatitudo* yields the English word "*Beatitudes*." It means "*fortunate*" or "*happy*". "Poor in Spirit" refers to those who are totally dependent on God. Recall the image of Peter, Andrew James, and John responding to the call of Jesus in last Sunday's Gospel. (**Matt. 4:1-12**). Those who mourn, who are meek, who seek righteousness, are merciful, pure of heart, peaceful, and persecuted are fortunate indeed if their attitude is total dependence on Jesus Christ.

Each one of the Beatitudes has two parts. The first part reveals the humiliation of the present; the second reveals the triumph that is to come. Living this code of conduct, the Beatitudes, cost Jesus his life. Those who follow Jesus, by living the Beatitudes, will, at the very least, experience some form of persecution.

The mountain is a special place where our vision is expanded. Just as Moses proclaimed the Old Law on a mountain, so did Jesus announce the New Law on a mountain. He announced that in His love, we are too blessed to be stressed! **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Why are the Beatitudes considered to summarize the Law of the New Covenant?

Pray About It!

Monday

Read Matt 5:3. Deny yourself something on which you are dependant.

Tuesday

Read Matt 5:5. Find ways to practice humility.

Wednesday

Read Matt. 5:7. Be the face of God's mercy today.

Thursday

Read Matt. 5:8. Purify your heart with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Friday

Read Matt 5:9. Be a peacemaker today.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church Teaches

1979 The natural law is immutable, permanent throughout history. The rules that express it remain substantially valid. It is a necessary foundation for the erection of moral rules and civil law.

1980 The Old Law is the first stage of revealed law. Its moral prescriptions are summed up in the Ten Commandments.

1981 The Law of Moses contains many truths naturally accessible to reason. God has revealed them because men did not read them in their hearts.

1982 The Old Law is a preparation for the Gospel.

1983 The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit received by faith in Christ, operating through charity. It finds expression above all in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount and uses the sacraments to communicate grace to us.

Resources:

https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results.html?q=stress;

<http://liturgy.slu.edu/4OrdA012917/theword.html>;

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/012917.cfm>; Gospels & Acts, The Navarre Bible, Readers Edition, Four Courts Press, Dublin, Scepter Publishers, Trenton New Jersey, pp. 75-79. The College Bible Commentary, New Testament Robert J. Karros O.F.M., General Editor. The Gospel of Matthew, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. pp. 869-870. and 1 Corinthians Mary Ann Getty, pp 1107-1108, The Liturgical Pres, Collegeville Minnesota;

[https://www.bustle.com/articles/62662-the-7-things-americans-stress-out-about-most-because-less-money-mo-problems.](https://www.bustle.com/articles/62662-the-7-things-americans-stress-out-about-most-because-less-money-mo-problems)

This meditation is prepared by Deacon Terrel J. Broussard for personal use in Adult Faith Formation at St. Peter Claver and St Maria Goretti Parishes in New Orleans, La. ©2017