

## Reconciliation Service: Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020

We are all familiar with the story of Moses receiving the 10 Commandment either by reading our own Bibles or maybe by watching the classic movie of the same title:



“The 10 Commandments.”

These commandments are still central to our lives as we try to live in relationship to God, neighbour, and self. Some theologians say that the 10 Commandments had a reincarnation, of sorts,

when Jesus gave us the Beatitudes. I personally don't think we ought to ditch the 10 Commandments in favor of the Beatitudes but see them as two sides of the same coin. One was written by the finger of God on Mount Sinai and the other spoken from the mouth of the Son of God, Jesus, during the sermon on the mount. They both come from God. While the 10 Commandments were given to us 1500 years before Jesus spoke the Beatitudes, in some sense the Beatitudes are actually older. Let me explain.

The word beatitude means blessing. To bless is to speak well of. For you older folks, you grew up in a Church that used a word we don't hear so much of anymore—“benediction.” Benediction come from the words: bene=well and diction=to speak. So, to pronounce a blessing or a benediction is to speak well of someone or something. In the act of creation, long before the 10 Commandments, we get the first blessing, the first benediction. When God saw what God had created, God said, **“This is good.”** And when God created human beings on the sixth day, God said, **“This is very good.”** From the very beginning, God spoke well of us and all that God had created. There was nothing wrong with God's eyesight. What God saw really was worthy of the word: good. Those words of blessing are pronounced in the opening lines of the Bible, in the Book of Genesis, and not once in all of Scripture, does God ever take that blessing back. In fact, I believe the Beatitudes only reinforce the blessing all the more.

Eight times Jesus says, **“Blessed are you.”** There is nothing wrong with Jesus' eyesight either. Like God, Jesus tells us the truth of what he sees. When Jesus assumed the mountain, there was a practical dimension to it—you just see more

the higher up you go. And who has the highest and biggest and truest perspective of all? God. Jesus assumes the mountain to tell us what God sees when God looks at us. Remember, at creation, God saw what God had created and called it good, the first blessing, the first benediction. Now, like God the Creator, Jesus looks out and says, ***"Blessed."*** He is speaking well of everything and everyone he sees. It's creation all over again, or perhaps, recreation. I think in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a recreation happens; we are made new again.

When Jesus saw the crowd of people, he could have chosen to see our greed, our pettiness, our selfishness, our sin, our self-loathing, our shame, our dishonesty, our inconsistent discipleship, our shallow faith, or our feeble prayer life. It would have been a true description of that crowd 2000 years ago as much as it is a description of us today. Yet, Jesus chose to see a deeper truth in us. He saw a deeper blessedness that could not be eradicated by poverty, or mourning, or excessive meekness, or hungering and thirsting, or persecution. He saw the deepest truth in us and wanted us to identify with this deep truth as well. Perhaps the sin of not loving ourselves as we ought to, is the problem of blindness and deafness. We don't see and hear the truth that we are God's blessed and so, in time, we fail to see and hear the truth that our neighbour is also God's blessed. No wonder Jesus says, ***"You have eyes, but you do not see; and you have ears, but you do not hear."*** Maybe that's what sin is in its simplest form—blindness and deafness to the original blessing. Here's a story of blessing that the late Fr. Henri Nouwen recalls while he lived and worked with the mentally challenged at L'Arche. I knew Henri a little bit as well as the people mentioned in this story. It's an actually story of what a blessing is all about. He writes:

Not long ago, in my own community, I had a very personal experience of the power of a real blessing. Shortly before I started a prayer service in one of our houses, Janet, a handicapped member of our community, said to me: "Henri, can you give me a blessing?" I responded in a somewhat automatic way by tracing with my thumb the sign of the cross on her forehead. Instead of being grateful, however, she protested vehemently, "No, that doesn't work. I want a real blessing!" I suddenly



became aware of the ritualistic quality of my response to her request and said, "Oh, I am sorry...let me give you a real blessing when we are all together for the prayer service." She nodded with a smile, and I realized that something special was required of me. After the service, when about thirty people were sitting in a circle on the floor, I said, "Janet has asked me for a special blessing. She feels that she needs that now." As I was saying this, I didn't know what Janet really wanted. But Janet didn't leave me in doubt for very long. As soon as I had said, "Janet has asked me for a special blessing," she stood up and walked toward me. I was wearing a long white robe with ample sleeves covering my hands as well as my arms. Spontaneously, Janet put her arms around me and put her head against my chest. Without thinking, I covered her with my sleeves so that she almost vanished in the folds of my robe. As we held each other, I said, "Janet, I want you to know that you are God's Beloved Daughter. You are precious in God's eyes. Your beautiful smile, your kindness to the people in your house and all the good things you do show us what a beautiful human being you are. I know you feel a little low these days and that there is some sadness in your heart, but I want you to remember who you are: a very special person, deeply loved by God and all the people who are here with you."

As I said these words, Janet raised her head and looked at me; and her broad smile showed that she had really heard and received the blessing. When she returned to her place, Jane, another handicapped woman, raised her hand and said, "I want a blessing too." She stood up and, before I knew it, had put her face against my chest. After I had spoken words of blessing to her, many more of the handicapped people followed, expressing the same desire to be blessed. The most touching moment, however, came when one of the assistants, a twenty-four-year-old student, raised his hand and said, "And what about me?" "Sure," I said. He came, and, as we stood before each other, I put my arms around him and said, "John, it is so good that you are here. You are God's Beloved Son. Your presence is a joy for all of us. When things are hard and life is burdensome, always remember that you are loved with an everlasting love." As I spoke these words, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and then he said, "Thank you, thank you very much."

From time to time, we all need to hear the words of blessing, that despite our sin, God still speaks well of us and always will.

Fr. Phil