

Strength in beatitudes

Sometimes great wisdom comes in short sentences. Sister Dorothy Hunt, a retired School Sister of Notre Dame, said “If everybody kept the Ten Commandments, the prisons would be empty. If everyone lived the beatitudes, it would be heaven on earth!” Such simplicity and such profound wisdom in just a few sentences.

For those who may be struggling to remember the Ten Commandments, the full text is in Exodus, chapter 20. Here is the short form:

“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me.

“You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.

“Remember to keep holy the Sabbath.

“Honor your father and your mother.

“You shall not kill.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.”

So simple to list them. So challenging to keep them! In fact, the Church teaches that the only two sinless people in history are Jesus and Mary. Imagine. Of all the billions of people who have lived on this planet, only two never sinned.

Why is sin so attractive? I guess the old trinity of the “world, the flesh and the devil” is as simple an explanation. The world always has flashing lights around evil. Good seems boring. The flesh is weak. Even St. Paul could say that “the things I want to

do I don't do, and things I don't want to do I do!" And the devil is that subtle voice of temptation which says "my way is easier than God's."

What about the beatitudes? There are two lists in the Gospels, Luke and Matthew. However, since Moses gave us the commandments and since Matthew pictures Jesus as the new Moses, I'll quote Matthew's Beatitudes:

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

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

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

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

It would be heaven on earth if we all lived the beatitudes.

The challenge, of course, is that the commandments and beatitudes are nothing new. So allow me to close with the story of the king who heard there was a new religious teacher with a new doctrine. He traveled hundreds of miles with his retinue and upon arrival, tired and exhausted, asked the holy man what his doctrine was. The holy man replied: "My doctrine is one sentence. Do all the good you can and avoid all the evil you can." The king was furious. "I went to all this trouble to travel at great expense to learn what I heard when I was three years old? You insult me!"

The holy man replied, "It is true that you learned this when you were three years old, but at 50 years old, you have forgotten it!"