Chadian Sister Engages Kansas City Youth about Peace and Justice

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The Beatitudes

Very often The Beatitudes are presented as the charter of Christian life and of Peacemakers. This is true if we look closely. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are those who mourn and who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful.

What is peace and nonviolence if not a desire to live a blessed life? The longing to live happily and in peace resides in everyone’s heart, whether poor or rich, African, European, American, or Asian. Happiness does not have a color, ethnic group, or race. Humans, not animals, yearn for happiness… but what do I know about that!

I appreciate how Jesus shared The Beatitudes when teaching. “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went to the
mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.”

He was teaching the crowd, granted, but the teachings were also meant for his friends, to bring them closer to him. This means that one must learn, but learning is not enough. It leads to adhesion and commitment. One does not decree oneself a peacemaker. It comes about over time.

We hear a call from inside to become a “maker” or artisan of peace and nonviolence. A call in the intimacy of a heart which acknowledges its poverty and misery. In a heart which knows itself as a partner in evil because of human frailty and fallibility. But a heart which longs and aspires for joy.

Rehearing The Beatitudes in the context of this experience as “activist in residence” at Avila University helps me rediscover how much this text is, indeed, a guide for those who long for the happiness that flows from peace and nonviolence.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” or in heart. You need a humble heart to acknowledge that peace is a gift of God and to accept to collaborate for peace. To have a humble heart is not to fold one’s arms and wait for what falls from heaven. Peace is work, and the poor of heart know that it is not only by the strength of their desire and their work that peace will come about.

It is by putting things in motion, by opening one’s arms, hands, and heart to others, that peace can happen. It is the accumulation of our personal charisms. Peace is the fruit of solidarity. Putting together our abilities does not impoverish us. On the contrary, it enriches us manifold times! So, yes, blessed are those who know that they are nothing without others. Blessed are those who acknowledge that their riches are in God and in universal fraternity, to borrow an expression from Charles de Foucauld.
“Blessed are the meek.” That’s nonviolence! The meek have encountered their own violence and contain it, not with tension but with acceptance and the peace of self knowledge. They have experienced their own limits and learned to calm their wrath by welcoming and understanding others. They know they are loved and do not have to live up to or match a certain image. Knowing that we are loved as we are pacifies us and makes us gentle.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” Purity has to do with transparency. To be transparent to God and others is to be “connected,” as we say nowadays! It is to have no shadow zone in our relationships with God and others. Purity rejoins one of the pillars of peace, which is Truth. Truth not in the sense of one who knows everything and imposes it on others but truth in the simplicity which adjusts and accords with others in authentic ways.

“Blessed are those who mourn… who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Blessed are those who let themselves be touched by the shouting of the victims of injustice. They will be artisans of Justice and Peace.

“Blessed are the merciful.” Only compassion and true love can take us out of our comfort, to join the combat of those who suffer and hunger and thirst for justice. Yes, blessed are these, for they will be able to recognise themselves in Jesus’ suffering! It is this love which does not stop at our differences or at our bad actions which makes us artisans of Justice and Peace.