

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

There are soldiers. And then there are soldiers.

Until Afghanistan I had no idea how much our nation depends on the elite units in the military.

These are the units that drop in behind enemy lines and move undetected through hostile territory. In their equipment and in their conditioning, their physical and mental toughness, they are able to devastate an enemy.

There are soldiers and then there are soldiers.

Through the ages the attitude has been – There are Christians and then there are Christians.

In some generations the very best and the very brightest entered monasteries to discipline body and spirit in holiness. Poverty, chastity, obedience – demands not expected of normal Christians but achieved by these elite disciples. St. Francis, St. Ignatius, Mother Teresa. Up before the crack of dawn praying. Sixteen, seventeen hour days spent in worship – in service.

There are Christians. And then there are Christians, real Christians. Saints.

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 will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

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

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples, to the elite corps. Many would say that Jesus was setting an ideal before them, virtues for them to achieve. These are the words for the real Christians – but not words for me. Not words for you.

But what if you are the real Christians? What if every single word that comes out of Jesus mouth is intended for you? What if Jesus really intends that you would not be a troublemaker or a complainer but that you would be a peacemaker? What if Jesus really intends that you would not have a heart that gets polluted by envy and greed and lust and pride, but a heart that is pure? What if Jesus really intends that you would not accommodate yourself to being the way you are but that you would hunger and thirst for being the person God wants you to be? What if Jesus really intends that you would not have a heart that is judgmental but a heart that is merciful?

I remember how it was for my two daughters as they grew up. When we lived in North Dakota the parsonage was large enough that Beth and Katie each had her own room. Beth was Miss Neat and Tidy. Katie was Miss Freedom above all else – especially freedom from room cleaning. When we moved to Ohio and bought our own home the girls needed to share a room. I can still remember my conversation with Sue about that. I predicted there would be war. And there was – not a raging battle but a constant smoldering with periodic eruptions. So it was for years.

Then one summer Beth decided to work in Colorado and Katie decided to bypass the opportunity to be a counselor at Lutheran Memorial Camp and to just be in Colorado with her sister. Something changed. That

summer as they lived together and traveled together a bond was formed. A respect. A love. Beth is still Beth and Katie is still Katie but they did not settle for the smoldering fire of anger.

Now through it all my love for my daughters did not change – whether they were at war or whether they were at peace they were my daughters. But I wanted more for them – love between them. I rejoiced when they grew in their relationship.

Jesus rejoices when you grow. When you change from being judgmental to having mercy Jesus rejoices. When you struggle for peace in a relationship Jesus rejoices. Every time through Jesus' help you resist whatever would pollute your heart Jesus rejoices. But all the time – in every moment – before you grow – after you grow – even if you do not grow – you are a real Christian. You belong to God through Christ as much as St. Francis or Mother Teresa. Everything Jesus hoped for them Jesus hopes for you –love, kindness, gentleness, self-control.

But whether these are evident in your life or not St. Paul tells you that God is “the source of your life in Jesus Christ, whom God made your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, and your redemption.” Jesus is the one who makes you a real Christian, his death for you gives you elite status with God. There is no more elite corps than the one you are in because the only Son of God gave his life for you. For all her love Mother Teresa knew that her love was not her hope but Jesus' love for her. St. Francis knew the same. And so do you.