

Sanctus (Vienna) "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined  
ABB-E-13<sup>23</sup> by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: 'How happy  
are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy the gentle: they shall  
have the earth for their heritage. Happy those who mourn: they shall be comforted.  
Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied. Happy  
the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Happy the pure in heart: they shall  
see God. Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God. Happy those  
who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' 'Happy  
are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny  
against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in  
heaven.'" — The Beatitudes, from the gospel of St Matthew, a key section of  
the New Testament. There's been discussion among Christians about the Beatitudes at  
least since the time of St Jerome 16 hundred years ago, who mused about the one  
on putting up with persecution: "I don't know who among us can practice it;  
who could have a good name slandered, and turn around rejoicing in the Lord?"  
Jerome took the Beatitudes in one of the ways they've been understood through the  
centuries. He seems to have believed that Jesus created a new law, just as  
Moses had laid out the Old Law. This law is absolutely to be obeyed and  
everyone (true to what is most authentically human) is to be poor in spirit, gentle,  
merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker.... Of course [this explanation goes on],  
Jesus knew even while laying out the new law that we could not keep it. He  
understood perfectly well what a gaggle of sinners would become His disciples.  
That is why He preached God's mercy so forcibly, a thing any one of us can

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appreciate. | This somewhat legalistic understanding of the Beatitudes as law contains  
more than a little truth in it. Jesus Christ is the most authentically human of all of us.  
He certainly kept these "laws" (if that's what they are), perfectly. | But, often  
think of the Beatitudes as spiritual ideals, as summing up the ideal Christian life.  
The ideal is altogether sublime, and only the very holy are called to attain it,  
while the rest of us grovel. But the mere presence of the ideal in Christ and in His  
saints brings home to each of us our complete incompetence before God, and turns  
us to Him in humility. That (some think) is what Jesus hoped to achieve in  
enunciating the Beatitudes. This second explanation opens a great truth —  
nowhere is God's power plainer than in our powerlessness to achieve anything real  
in serving Him. We may be wonderfully cunning in micro-chips and laser beams,  
and sailing a camera through the rings of <sup>the planets</sup> Saturn. But the fall-out is  
injustice and inequities, and we know no peace. | A third interpretation is  
connected with the Last Day. Some scholars have thought that Jesus expected the  
end of things, the parousia, to come promptly. Thinking that the world would  
presently go up in smoke, He gave His disciples a kind of "interim ethic", a  
heroic code that anyone might follow for a short time. But then, could Jesus  
expect disciples to live the Beatitudes once they were over the bad case of  
nerves they got waiting for a quick Armageddon? If this third explanation  
snacks of letting disciples off some sharp hooks, it also opens up a truth.  
None of us know when our personal 'parousia' will come, so every Christian  
ethic is a kind of heroic "interim ethic". This explanation suggests the  
uncomfortable truth that Jesus Christ actually expects His disciples to live in

a way which non-disciples (depending on how broadminded they are) will consider either heroic or quite excessively mad. The truth is, it's not just the Beatitudes that demand heroism, but everything Jesus said and did, right down to the business of taking up the cross daily. We're down to the bottom line: however else they may be understood (as law, as ideal, as panic reaction), the Beatitudes are certainly a broad-stroked sketch by Jesus Christ of His own way of seeing human life. They express vividly what St Paul called "the mind of the Lord Jesus" which we are to put on. | Think & pray about that a while now, as we hear: "Jesus is Love"

Love Divine  
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MUSIC

PRAYERS [Deiss Bible 113]

The Beatitudes

express the mind of Christ — and this is precisely why the early Christians kept these teachings together and handed them on orally for half a century before Matthew wrote them down at the very beginning of his collection of the teachings of the Lord, the Sermon on the Mount. They show succinctly the shift from the way non-disciples look at the world of humankind to the way Christ's disciples look at it. The same reality, a different appreciation. The same epochs, a different history. The same events and actors, a different story with differing Beginning, middle and End. It's difficult to sketch that different mentality briefly: Jesus does it in the Beatitudes. Anyone who stands inside them, <sup>so to speak</sup> stands inside the mind of Christ. It's a revised set possible only if we do not get caught in the trap of looking on life in time as the whole of life. Here's the deepest difference: we are able to rejoice & be glad because we trust that our reward will be great in heaven. Oddly that thought is not very popular today, even among the disciples.