

January 29th 2017
All Parish Meeting Rectors Address

Micah 6:1-8

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Psalm 15

This is the 27th time I've made my address on the state of the parish – and the 5th time I've made it before the Saints gathered at Grace in the Desert. I have delivered the Rectors Reports in times of world and national strife, and a few times in more peaceful circumstances. I have addressed God's abundances during the great recession, and I have proclaimed a universal equality for all of God's children in the face of nations proclaiming scarcity, fear and division. It is written, "All Souls are mine saith the Lord!" (Ez 18:4) I deliver this report, each time, as the days homily, mostly, because of the 250 people or so present in these three services, less than half will attend the business meeting. But beyond numbers I am surprised and delighted of how often the lections fit the day and today the readings are spot on.

It seems that there is a natural condition that creates in institutions and individuals the need to create God in their own image; Rich, Powerful, Respected – in doing so there is created one up, one down societies and relationships. Micah, St Paul and Jesus are having none of this view and call God's people to repentance and a wholly different path.

One of the questions that is asked at most all of the confirmation classes I've taught is "What does it mean to fear the Lord? Is this not the God of love? How do we think about this?" My response to this question is an invitation to think of one's posture and relationship before

the Lord. Fear Understood as a posture of AWE and WONDER. But it's deeper than that. When we create in our image, we assume God on the world's terms and nothing could be further from the truth. "My ways are not your ways, nor your ways my ways says the Lord." (Is 55) Micah speaks out of understanding the fear of the Lord. The nations are not the ultimate threat --- God is. Jesus' words' calling us to fear God not man, reminds us to whom we belong and – in light of his love- to check our egos and walk in humility.

I always heard Micah's call to Justice, Mercy, and Humility as a kind of obvious and almost gentle prophecy. It's not! Micah is furious --- calling both nations, Judah and Israel into strict observance of the laws of Social Justice. His prophecy is born out of his awareness of what he sees, that there is no justice in the land and his words emphasize that the people should know better – God has told you, O mortal, what is good – and you have not turned --- the rulers, the judges, the prophets' are corrupt. Social Justice is to be --- **Reading from**

Deuteronomy 10

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, ¹⁸who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. ¹⁹You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²⁰You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear.

Justice, Mercy and Humility-- are not separate behaviors –they are one.

As Jesus begins his public ministry, he invites us on a different path than that of the nations. The beatitudes or blessings have at their heart our happiness – a new set of community ideals of love and humility of mercy and compassion and justice.

Pope Francis proposed a more modern version of the beatitudes this past All Saints Day:

1. Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others and forgives them from their heart.
2. Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and the marginalized and show then their closeness
3. Blessed are those who see God in every person and strive to make others also discover him.
4. Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home
5. Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others.
6. Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians – **(And I would add all religions).**

In 2016 we have moved to embrace these ideals – these Blessings of finding true happiness and joy. The annual report, available during the business meeting makes clear the many ways we walk in humility with God and I commend to each of you these committee reports. We have worshiped, adored, sung and sought out God’s path for us in Community. We have given in gratitude, living in God’s abundance. Though this body, this church; we have healed and tended to the needs of many. In committing to our education we have sought to understand the faith that is in our hearts; and we truly love each other and the sojourner we find in our midst --- we like to be together.

Justice, Mercy, Humility, one path of Blessing – one path of Happiness – for God has shown us what is good and what is required of us. At the 10:30am service, it has become my practice

to approach the Altar and to kneel in silent prayer for 5 minutes before the start of the liturgy. My prayer is a practice of interceding on behalf of this church and lifting us before God – praying that we may be healed, that we may be blessed and that God will pour his light before us and continue to bless the work of our hands. I find myself in AWE during those minutes. At the end, following the blessing, I am one again in AWE as I look at all of you – you vessels of Grace filled with the body and blood of Jesus – going out into the world as messengers of peace.

Go in humility as God fearing sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Fear no nation or ruler and work for justice and mercy. You are God's beloved.