

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduces the kind of life those who seek the Kingdom of God must lead. His homily could properly be called, "The Righteousness of the Kingdom." It can be divided into several sections.

1. *The Beatitudes:* The sermon begins with the Beatitudes (the "blessings"), which describe the joys of true discipleship, the blessed way of life. The people of God await the rewards Jesus promises in this section.

2. *The new covenant:* Then, as the Son of God whose authority is greater than that of Moses, Christ proclaims the new law, the righteousness leading toward perfection, to which the Mosaic Law and the prophets pointed. Jesus reveals the deeper meaning of several Old Testament laws, broadening their implications.

(a) "You shall not murder" is expanded beyond the command against physically killing another. Murder now includes anger, calling someone a fool, and failure to be reconciled with a friend or adversary.

(b) "You shall not commit adultery" no longer refers only to the unlawful act of sex outside marriage. It now includes lust.

(c) Divorce was allowable under the Old Testament law. But under the new covenant, divorce is permissible only because of sexual immorality, and remarriage to a divorced person is not permitted.

(d) "Perform your oaths to the Lord" is the Old Testament law. Jesus instructs us to say "Yes" or "no" without taking an oath, and to keep our word.

(e) "An eye for an eye" - a graphic way of seeing justice from a human perspective - becomes "turn the other [cheek]" and "love your enemies." Not only must we forsake vengeance, even when it is just retribution; we must treat others as God treats us with mercy and grace.

3. *Spiritual disciplines:* Jesus assumes we will follow three disciplines that help us attain true righteousness and true wisdom. These disciplines are a vital part of Christian tradition.

(a) Giving alms, or doing charitable deeds for the poor, should be done secretly, before God and not before men.

(b) Prayer should follow the model of the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus here reveals to His Church.

(c) Fasting should likewise be done to please God, not men.

These disciplines help us find true wisdom, which consists of (1) the love of God and pursuit of His righteousness by bringing our treasure as alms to God, and our

worries in prayer and fasting to Him; and (2) the love of human beings and pursuit of righteous reconciliation with them by submitting our judgments of them to God's severe mercy. For these difficult tasks we need divine discernment and guidance, which God provides to those who follow Jesus' spiritual rule. Thus our natural impulses are redirected toward their proper goal: the righteousness of God in His Kingdom.

4. *Exhortations to righteousness:* Jesus concludes with exhortations to true righteousness, warnings about hypocritical and deceitful professions of righteousness, and instructions to build on the rock of His teachings.