Columns
Social Justice



(Unsplash/Jon Tyson)



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Watching and reading the news of the day has become an arduous task for me. I have always been interested in politics, not only U.S. politics, but also the global scene.

The last few weeks have been torture. The divisions in the U.S. are not isolated. Civil wars and uprisings seem to be on the rise globally. So much of the world's people are divided within their families, friends and colleagues about politics, religion, visions of the future, cultural values and the list goes on. It leads me to reflect on this passage from Mark 3:24-25: "If a realm is torn by civil strife it cannot last. If a household is divided according to loyalties, it will not survive."

How do we begin a journey to understanding so that we can move forward as people who are united in love and compassion rather than greed and selfishness?

The time has come for each one of us to commit to binding wounds through deliberate actions to listen and respect each other's views and opinions so that we can enter into dialogue. The most difficult conversations will no doubt be among people who are connected by deep familial bonds. Yet, we are faced with the challenge to attempt to bridge the chasm. We have a road map to begin the journey to reconciliation. Jesus gave us the Beatitudes.

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Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, the kindom of heaven is theirs.

Poor in spirit means that I have to do more than share what I have. It means I have to work to end the cycle of systemic poverty that keeps people from achieving a life that supports vibrant living. Matthew Desmond, in his *Poverty, by America*, asks us to consider being poverty abolitionists. Educating ourselves about how we can affect change is crucial to making a difference. It is a difference that will extend to how we can live sustainably to improve lives and how we live in harmony with creation. Will we live sustainably using only what we need so others may have what they need?

Blessed are those who are mourning for they shall be consoled.

To have empathy for those who are suffering is crucial for our spiritual growth. When we share in another's pain, whether physical, emotional or spiritual, we bring

wholeness to ourselves as well as the person in mourning. Hearts are opened because we make ourselves available and vulnerable. We allow Jesus to enter our being.

Blessed are those who are gentle, they will inherit the land.

Gentle or meek does not mean standing in the shadows silently. It means not being arrogant about my opinions. Being gentle allows me to listen with humility and curiosity about opinions and views that are diametrically opposed to my views. Being meek means I can offer my thoughts to have a conversation rather than a monologue.



A church window depicts Jesus giving his Sermon on the Mount, which begins with the beatitudes. (CNS/Crosiers)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they will have their fill.

From my experience, many people can recognize injustice when they see it — whether racial profiling, discrimination based on sexual identity, bigotry against

religions, policies that support wealthy interests over the needs of the poor or systemic misogyny. The challenge is what to do about it. Am I willing to speak out for justice knowing I will suffer the consequences of criticism and ridicule?

Blessed are those who show mercy to others, they will be shown mercy.

Sometimes there are rather insignificant situations that are relatively easy to forgive. An insult, an altercation between colleagues, a family squabble, but what of the situations that have caused grief and deep hurt to others? Can I set aside my righteous anger and embrace that humanity of another who has caused me deep-seeded anguish? Compassion is foundational to the teachings of Jesus. Can we embrace compassion?

Blessed are those whose hearts are clean, for they shall see God.

When I meet someone, do I see a person who is God's own? Is my heart open to the goodness that another embodies? My heart needs to be purged of prejudices and cynicism that cloud my vision of others. I project what I am to others. If my heart is free from judgement, I can be fully present to others.

Blessed are those who work for peace, they will be called the children of God.

I often end correspondence with "Peace" and feel good about that. However, that is not being a peacemaker. Jesus is clear about reconciliation. "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times' " (Mt. 18:21-22).

Peacemaking is about reconciliation whether unintentional mistakes or gross acts of malice. "I am sorry" can often be the three most difficult words to say; yet they can be the first step to real peacemaking.

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Blessed are those who are persecuted because of their struggle for justice, the kindom of heaven is theirs.

And those who suffer for righteous causes are certainly blessed! The courage and commitment it requires to stand firm for justice as a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves, is the epitome of "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). When we honor the martyrs, who remained a presence of Christ in the face of certain torture and death, we strengthen our resolve to live the mandate of love, mercy and justice.

The Beatitudes is the mandate to work in the path marked out by Jesus the Christ.