

Matthew tells us explicitly that upon hearing the “Sermon” that the people were “alarmed” at His way of teaching. He teaches not as the rabbis do, but as one who has “authority” – a far greater authority than even Moses. This is why Matthew begins with Christ going up the Mountain. Like Moses (Ex 20) Jesus Christ goes up the Mountain – but there He does not receive the Law from God, no He gives the New Law because He is God.

5:17-20 **“I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.”**

The Law is God’s fatherly instruction for happiness but when we hear law we hear bad news. The generally prevailing idea is that Christians have to observe an immense number of commandments and restrictions, so that Christianity is a heavy and oppressive way of living, and it would be more liberating to live without all these burdens. As Pope Benedict said, “To be sustained by this great love and God’s sublime revelation is not a burden, but rather a set of wings, that it is truly beautiful to be a Christian.” His law is Good News, but we mistrust the goodness of God and His law. That which we perceive to be good we want to maximize. That which we perceive to be bad we want to minimize. So they were hoping Jesus would do away with the law, to which He responds, “I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.”

The Sermon on the Mount is the expression of a life worth living. It is the expression of a human life in its fullest potential here and hereafter.

The key to the Sermon on the Mount is the way Jesus used two expressions:

1. “You have heard”
2. And the short, emphatic word, “But.”

These expressions of the Natural Law (the most privileged of which is the 10 Commandments) lay a foundation for the happiness we seek – But they are just that, a foundation, a beginning, *the bare minimum* – If we only want **minimal** happiness we will obey the 10 Commandments. If we long for the fullness of happiness - Then we will live the fullness of the law of love as Christ expresses it in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins with the 10 Commandments – *the bare minimum of happiness* – by saying, “You have heard.” He takes us to *the fullness of happiness* with the short emphatic word, “But.” “You have heard what was said of old, but I say to you...” He is speaking directly to you and me.

Matthew 5:21-48 Virtue as the means to a beautiful life

Matthew 6 Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving

Where your treasure is there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:21) The treasure is Jesus Christ and union with Him. Jesus enjoins His disciples to prefer Him to everything.

Luke 14:25-33 Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving are the primary exterior acts that reflect whether we have made Christ the treasure or not – love must be put into action.

Matthew 6:1 Beware of practicing your piety before men, literally “righteousness” from the Greek word, which denotes one’s restored relationship as an adopted son or daughter of God. Jesus teaches us that almsgiving, prayer and fasting are essential elements of our relationship with the Father. In verses 2, 5, 16 these are not optional; Jesus assumes we are practicing these.

Almsgiving

Out of justice the faithful have the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church.

Scripture bears witness to the fact that God commanded the Israelites to offer a tithe to the Lord, Leviticus 27:30 “All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord.” The Greek and Hebrew words for “tithe” literally mean “tenth.”

We are our brother’s keeper. Solidarity is the virtue that practices the sharing of spiritual and material goods. Created in the image of God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature, the same origin and all are called to participate in the same divine happiness. All therefore enjoy an equal dignity.

This is where equality ends. On coming into this world, man is not equipped with everything he needs for developing his bodily and spiritual life. He needs others. Differences appear tied to age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and the distribution of wealth.

The talents are not distributed equally. These differences belong to God’s plan. He wills that each receives what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular talents share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness and sharing of goods. There exist sinful inequalities, which we are obliged to fight against. The good inequalities require the virtue of solidarity that practices the sharing of spiritual and material goods.

In the CCC almsgiving is principally discussed under the 7th commandment, “You shall not steal,” because to not enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them. Love for the poor is incompatible with an immoderate love for riches. How much money is thrown away unnecessarily?

Matthew 6: 5-6

Prayer

The example of Jesus at prayer (Mark 1:35; Mark 6:46; Luke 5:12; Luke 6:12; Luke 11:1, “He was praying in a certain place and when He had ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’”) His desire is that we have the same relationship with the Father so He invites us to “go into our room, close the door and speak to the Father who sees in secret.” Prayer is an intimate conversation with God. It consists of speaking, listening, loving, resting. We need to speak to God but also to listen to Him, especially by means of reading and meditating on Scripture.

Read; Think; Love Him; Carry this point of love for him through the day; let it be the motivation for changing our actions

Make an appointment with God each day.

Fasting

If we only fill ourselves up with the things of the world – we remain hungry.

Sacrifice some of the things of the world to make a space for God, for example, busyness, entertainment, noise or television.

Offer sacrifices for the good of others (either what you choose or what God allows).
Establish a morning offering.

Matthew 6:25-33 Trust in Our Father’s Providential Care

Jesus refers to God as our Father ten times in chapter six.

- Meditate to be open to know God’s will
- Use human reason and prudence
 - Take wise counsel
 - Plan
 - Act – don’t procrastinate because you wait for mathematical certitude
- Fight anxiety with abandonment and trust in God’s providential care

Our Lord to St. Faustina about Trust

“My daughter, I assure you of a permanent income on which you will live. Your duty will be to trust completely in My goodness, and My duty will be to give you all you need. I am making Myself dependent upon your trust: if your trust is great, then My generosity will be without limit.”

Matthew 7:1-5 Plank-Eye

The only person you can change is yourself. What virtues are you lacking? Work on those.

Matthew 7:12-14 Enter by the narrow gate.

“There are two ways, the one of life, the other of death; but between the two, there is a great difference.” Didache 1 Dt 30:15-20

We have the gift of freedom. Freedom is the power to act. Actions have consequences. The consequence of grave sin is to separate oneself from God. Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God’s forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ’s kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices forever, with no turning back. This is why Christ says in 7:15, “Beware of false prophets” (false teachers and false doctrines), because your actions matter. They are the fruit that determine what kind of tree you are and if we bear bad fruit (vice), we might end in purgatory or even Hell (7:19)

Matthew 7: 21-27 Acting on God’s Word

Scripture teaches that we are saved by faith. Faith is when you hold something to be true based on the testimony of *God*. God tells you something you couldn’t have known on your own, (Eucharist). He tells us through Jesus, and through the Catholic Church which hands down His teaching. We make the decision to accept what He tells us as true. Then we respond to it (Act/Obedience). I must *act (be obedient)* in accord with what I now know, otherwise I really didn’t believe God in the first place.

Jesus makes it clear that we not only have to believe what He is saying, we have to do it:

Matthew 7: 21 “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 7:24 “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man...And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like the foolish man.”

Matthew 21:28 The parable of the two sons.

Wisdom consists not in hearing His word but in building our lives upon it. True wisdom would lead us to put Jesus’ words into practice. If we do, we will build the enduring house of the soul. It is maintained only through labor and the materials of the sacraments, prayer, and virtue.

The foolish man neglects sound construction and maintenance, building on a weak foundation of wealth and earthly success. The Day of Judgment will expose the foundation and destiny of every spiritual builder.

Listen to St. Bernard

“The spiritual house of the soul is the gaining and living of virtue; for as a material house is built with much hard labor and rises little by little, by various stones and beams, so is the spiritual house built by various virtues, and by long labor and slow improvements. The length of the house is long suffering, its width is love, its height is hope. The four walls are the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. The pavement is humility, the roof patience. The windows are the desire of becoming a saint, through which the light of the Gospel finds an entrance. The door is obedience to the commandments. The doorkeeper is holy fear. The watchmen are the angels. The children are the good works. The servants are our passions obedient to our intellect formed in truth. The table is Sacred Scripture, the bread is the Eucharist, the wine is the Blood of Christ, the living water and wellspring is the Holy Spirit. The oil is mercy. The bed is a quiet and peaceful mind. The sacraments are medicine; the priests are the doctors. The guests are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”