

may be inclined to bypass or even to ignore completely what seems to be simply framing the familiar sayings or story. When I was a Confirmand, my pastor required me to memorize the Beatitudes, but I do not recall being asked to also memorize the three verses before. Today, however, I can see that they are just as important as what follows and, in our world today, perhaps even more crucial for us to understand and take to heart. May God the Holy Spirit grant us the grace to read, hear and heed those verses together. ✠Amen.]*

[There is something puzzling about the description of those who have gathered to be healed by Jesus and to hear His Word. They are crowds streaming from north and south. This does not surprise us. Those coming from the south are Jews, or, more

accurately, Judæan Hebrews, members of the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Alongside of those southerners, but probably very separate from them, there would have been some Samaritans, those die-hard hill-shrine worshippers whom King David had never been able to persuade or beat into submission to make them worship on Mt. Zion, Jerusalem. From the immediate vicinity there were Galileans, Jews from little Jewish settlements like Nazareth and Cana, but Jews also from mixed Jewish-Gentile areas and some of mixed marriage or ancestry, inhabitants of 'Galilee of the Gentiles' like Peter, James and John, Andrew and Phillip and all the twelve chosen Disciples of Jesus' inner circle, not a pure-bred Judæan among them, except for Jesus, Son of Joseph from Bethlehem. And then, from the north

there came who?!: also a great multitude of “people from the coast of Tyre and Sidon.”]*

[*Tyre and Sidon?! You may--I hope you do!*—remember the names of those cities from last summer’s horrible little war, instigated by Iran and Hezbollah and prosecuted by Israel at a terrible human cost to the people of Lebanon. *That* was and is not Israel and *those people* were and are not Jews! What were *they* doing there, following the Messiah of Israel? That is a good question, one that I am sure many of those from Judæa and Galilee asked one another, or under their breath. I can imagine the Samaritans gleefully seeing the humor in the welcome these ‘outsider’s received from Jesus and His Disciples. Jesus had and would spend a good deal of time with the

outcast Samaritans, chatting with one of their loquacious women at a well, accepting the hospitality of a whole Samaritan town, holding up a Samaritan character in one of His great parables as an example of what it means to welcome and live in the Kingdom of God on earth, here and now in acts of extravagant mercy and compassion.]*

Why were *those people*, those Syrians and Phœnicians, those Philistines, those Lebanese, those *Arabs* there, with Jesus and His Disciples in northern Israel? They were there, where Jesus was, because, inexplicably, Jesus had been *there*, where they lived, not where He was supposed to be, but where they lived. He had been *among* them, on *their* streets, in *their* homes, sleeping under *their* roofs and—horrors!—

eating at their tables. *That* was what Jesus was up to in those occasional forays into foreign territory up north, and now the foreigners were surrounding Him, with all the others, the Samaritans, the Galileans, the Judæans, all the 'lost sheep of the House of Israel.'

And, what did Our Lord do when He came down to where the people were on that Galilean plain? Saint Luke, the Gentile convert and helper of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, was us to know the answer to that question in no uncertain terms:

"They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch Him, for power came out from Him and healed *all* of them" (vv 18 & 19).

He healed *all* of them, Jew and Gentile, Samaritan and Judæan and Galilean—*all* of them, without exception, so the Word of God bears witness in the memory of the Early Church.

'Apocalypse' is a popular word just now, thanks to Mel Gibson's latest blockbuster, *Apocalypto*. 'Apocalypse' means neither 'the end' nor 'a new beginning,' as the movie trailer would have it. 'Apocalypse' comes from the Greek word, ἀποκαλύπτω, meaning, literally, 'to draw back the curtain,' or, figuratively, 'to reveal that which is hidden.' 'That which is hidden could' mean 'THE END,' I suppose, the way things will finally turn out or find their fulfillment. It could also mean to reveal that which is real right now, that which we tend to

overlook or are too blind to see. The Apocalypse of Saint John the Divine, the Book of Revelation, reveals that God's love and goodness and power in Jesus Christ will ultimately defeat all evil and corruption and vicious oppression in this world by bringing this world to an end and ushering in the world to come, "a new heaven and a new earth." Many of the sayings and parables of Our Lord are 'apocalyptic' in that sense, teaching both repentance and peace through God's forgiveness, a sure confidence that the end of this evil age has already begun, though warning one and all not to try to predict how, when or where.

It seems to me that the scene in today's Gospel is such an 'apocalypse,' just such a parting of the curtains of our minds and imaginations to see

people who imagine each other to be enemies coming *together* with their broken bodies and minds and hopes, *together* at the feet of One Who had first come to be among *them*, speaking the love and mercy of God, embodying that love and mercy in His every word and deed, *uniting* all in one life of boundless hope and mutual acceptance.

It happened then and there, on the border between two peoples and two worlds, breaking down the border between people who had failed to notice one another as people and as children of the same Creator. Why can it not happen today, in the same place and elsewhere before more blood is shed and more lives are destroyed for nothing? *All* were healed, in body and in mind, and *all* stayed to receive His

teaching of the Kingdom of God that day. Why not *in these days?*

Perhaps we can do little to bring about peace in the Middle East, but let the peace of Christ at least be a reality among us, throughout the Church and in this Congregation, as He comes down from this high Altar in this and every House of which He is Lord to meet and unite with us where we live.

✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins us by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.

✠ Amen.

