

Session 8: Persecuted for Righteousness: Rejoice and Be Glad

What We Found

The frame closed: 5:10 repeats 5:3's present-tense promise, sealing the eight Beatitudes as one kingdom-bracketed composition, and 5:11-12 turns to you: reviled "on my account" (Jesus quietly aligning himself with righteousness), enrolled in the prophets' file, commanded to rejoice. Then the reveal we built for seven weeks, sealed by CCC 1717: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ. He lived every line: became poor, wept, gentle and lowly, hungered for the Father's will, forgave his executioners, kept guile from his lips, made peace by his blood, was persecuted from cradle to cross. The Beatitudes are a portrait before they are a program, and the program is becoming what you are looking at (2 Corinthians 3:18). Commissioned as salt and light (statements, not commands), we opened our Session 1 slips one last time beside the finished portrait, and each of us named a beatitude of the month. Rejoice and be glad.

Voices of the Church

ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH · LETTER TO THE ROMANS 4 (ROBERTS-DONALDSON TRANSLATION)

"I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ." St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, wrote these words to the church in Rome, traditionally around the year 107, while being transported under guard to his execution, begging the Roman Christians not to intervene. A man within living memory of the apostles read his own martyrdom through the Eucharist: his death, a becoming-bread.

Application (ours, not the saint's): Ignatius took "rejoice and be glad" at face value, under the only circumstances that fully test it.

TERTULLIAN · APOLOGY, CHAPTER 50

"The blood of Christians is seed." Tertullian, the fiery North African writer of the early Church (an early Christian author the Church reads with profit, though he is not among the canonized saints), closed his defense of Christianity to Rome's magistrates with this taunt: kill us and we multiply. History gave his claim real weight: the martyrs' witness became one of the great engines (not the only one) of the Church's growth inside the empire that killed them.

The eighth beatitude's promise has receipts: the kingdom really did belong to the persecuted.

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE · HIS LIFE; AUSCHWITZ, 1941

In the summer of 1941 at Auschwitz, after an escape, the camp selected ten men to die by starvation. When one of them, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out for his wife and children, a Polish Franciscan priest, St. Maximilian Kolbe, stepped forward and asked to take his place. He led the condemned in prayer and hymns from the starvation bunker for two weeks and was finally killed by lethal injection on August 14, 1941. Gajowniczek survived the war and was present in Rome when Kolbe was canonized.

The century so often called a century of martyrs was also among the brightest with this beatitude. Kolbe did not merely endure his persecutors; inside the machinery of hatred, he out-loved it.

Live It This Week

- Complete the set: memorize Matthew 5:10-12 and recite all of 5:3-12 each morning this month, until the portrait is memorized into you.
- Practice your beatitude of the month, beginning with the first concrete act you named tonight.
- Read Revelation 7:9-17 beside Matthew 5:3-12 once this week (see Dig Deeper).
- Consider where this group goes next; the leader has the Catholic Armory catalog. The mountain has more trails.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:16

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Catechism References

CCC 1716-1717 (the reveal), 1967, 2473; on the Church and the cross, 769

Before Next Session

The study is complete. Recite Matthew 5:3-12 each morning this month, and practice your beatitude of the month; your leader will check in. The Catholic Armory catalog has more trails up the mountain.