

Each week for the summer, a parishioner will reflect on a section of Pope Francis' Call to Holiness: his new Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)*, which you can read at <http://w2.vatican.va>

Going Against the Flow (paragraphs 63-94)

Before I introduce the Beatitudes in my 10th grade Christian Scripture class, I ask the students to spend a moment reflecting on two questions. First, what are a few of the happiest moments of your life? Second, in what moments of your life did you feel closest to God? Inevitably, their answers to the first question involve puppies, vacations, and fun with friends. Their answers to the second question are usually very different — “at my Grandpa’s funeral” or “when my friends all turned against me.”

It is in the discrepancy between their answers to these two questions that we find the meaning of the Beatitudes. As Pope Francis states in paragraph 64, the word “blessed” can also be translated “happy.” It doesn’t seem to make sense, then, to say that we’re “happy” when we’re mourning or persecuted. What the Beatitudes show us with this paradox is that our true happiness comes not from moments of pleasure, but from our holiness or our closeness to God. And when do we most clearly recognize God’s presence? It’s often when we are mourning, persecuted, or suffering in some other way.

As Pope Francis points out in this section, this kind of “happiness” or “holiness” is counter-cultural. It’s not about wealth, power, entertainment, relaxation, or an easy life. It is about hope in the face of loss, sharing in the suffering of others, forgiving those who hurt us, and working hard to build peace. While these experiences won’t bring a smile to our faces, Jesus promises that they will bring us **true** happiness/holiness/blessedness.

— Christine Kvam