

## February 16, 2025 – Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

### *Love Mercy by Pastor Julio Romero*

#### **Gospel: Luke 6:20-31**

Someone once said that a Bible verse taken out of context is like a diamond separated from its necklace—beautiful, but much better when it's in its proper place. This observation is particularly fitting for our Gospel text this morning, so let me provide some context for Jesus' teachings in this passage.

In the Gospel of Luke, the Beatitudes mark the beginning of what is known as the “Sermon on the Plain.” In contrast, the Gospel of Matthew calls it the “Sermon on the Mount.” While Matthew’s version of the sermon focuses more on the spiritual formation and attitudes of Jesus’ audience, Luke’s version emphasizes cultivating an attitude of kindness and generosity toward the less fortunate.

To understand this distinction, we need to consider the backgrounds of the two Gospel writers. Luke, a doctor by profession, was familiar with the everyday struggles of the sick, the poor, and those facing economic hardship. His grounded perspective is evident in how he portrays Jesus' message.

In Luke’s account of the “Sermon on the Plain,” Jesus speaks directly to those who are materially poor, hungry, grieving, and socially excluded. Luke's writing gives the impression that he was right there with Jesus, observing the scene up close. It doesn’t take much imagination to picture what that moment must have been like: a large crowd, many of whom were sick, desperately hoping for healing through a miracle. You can almost visualize people pushing and shoving, trying to get close enough to touch Jesus, knowing that simply being near Him could bring healing.

The scene on that plain was chaotic and far from the orderly worship services we are used to. The poor, the hungry, the rejected—they were all gathered around Jesus, and He spoke directly to them and said, “*You will laugh, yours is the Kingdom of God, you will be satisfied, you are blessed*”.

But Jesus didn’t stop there. I can imagine Jesus looking at those who were not standing close to him but who had also come to listen to him when he said,

*“But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.  
25 Woe to you who are well fed now,*

*for you will go hungry.  
Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.”*

Two thousand years ago, the Lord preached the Sermon on the Plain, and the way we see the world today shows that not much—if anything at all—has changed.

The crowd surrounding Jesus back then would look very similar to the one we might find today: the unemployed, the undocumented, the rejected—those whom society casts aside. The sick, the poor working families, and also those standing apart from Him, not mixing with the crowd—the CEOs, the millionaires, the billionaires, successful business people, and perhaps even all of us here. We would all be part of the scene of the “Sermon on the Plain” today.

In this Beatitudes, the Lord Jesus speaks to all of us. His eyes are fixed on each one of us, inviting all to respond—to come to Him, to act justly, and to care for one another. As the Prophet Micah shared the words from God: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

In the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Jesus' response to everyone on the plain was mercy—He healed them, comforted them, and enlightened them with His love and words, even though none of them may have felt they deserved it. Mercy is one of God's trademarks and attitudes, and it should be ours too. God teaches us not to withhold mercy or show it selectively.

There is a story of a young soldier in Napoleon's army who committed an offense deserving of death. The day before his scheduled execution, his mother went to Napoleon and asked him to show mercy. Napoleon coldly replied, “Woman, your son does not deserve mercy.” She responded, “I know, but if he deserved it, it wouldn't be mercy.”

The Scriptures tell us that God has shown us what is good. God knows how to show mercy better than any of us, but His hope is that we too will extend mercy to others.

This is why, in the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus gives us seven profound commands: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. Turn the other cheek to the one who strikes you. Give generously to everyone who asks you. And then Jesus lays down the Golden Rule: “*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*” With these startling commands,

Jesus is inviting us to practice mercy because this is exactly what we receive from Him.

We live in a state of absolute grace, thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, whose merciful heart, attitude, and words encourage us to comfort those who mourn with the promise that those who have passed are not dead, but alive in heaven. We are called to feed and clothe the poor, welcome the stranger, teach kindness, pursue justice, and walk humbly with God, as the Prophet Micah has said.

With a merciful and humble attitude, we join those on the plain who were shown mercy by Jesus. Let's not forget that we are the people upon whom God's face shines, who looks upon us with mercy, and gives us peace. **Amen.**