

Father O'Connor's Homily for 1 February 2026
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time-A

Zephaniah 2: 3; 3: 12-13
1 Corinthians 1: 26-31
Matthew 5: 1-12a

A man had not been feeling up to par. His wife and children finally prevailed upon him to see a doctor. He did, and it was a good thing that he did, because tests revealed that he had blockage in his arteries. The doctor reassured him, "You are going to feel a whole lot better when you get with this heart-smart program."

Jesus knows all about the human heart. What goes on in our hearts has a lot to do with our physical health, our mental and emotional health, and with our spiritual health. Today's Gospel is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up the mountain, and after He had sat down, His disciples came to Him." And the Gospel continues: "He began to teach them."

And the lesson that Jesus taught is called "The Beatitudes" or, as someone described them, "The Beautiful Attitudes." **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"**... and so on.

I would like to take a virtual yellow marker and highlight the sixth of those Beatitudes today: ***"Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God."*** When our hearts are not right with God, it has an effect on the way that we live and feel.

There was a person who said, "If I ever needed a heart transplant, I would like to have my boss's heart – because my boss never uses it!" We know what that means. We can legislate external behaviors. But not what goes on within someone's heart: we cannot force someone to love. Very often what goes on within our hearts will show itself externally, one way or another – positively or negatively.

So Jesus teaches us today: ***"Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God."*** This is a great teaching that helps each of us to think with the mind of Christ, and to love with the heart of Christ – the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ.

A word that we probably learned in school is one that we need to be very cautious in using, because it can have a very critical meaning. It is the word **hypocrite**. It is derived from two Greek words that mean “to speak from underneath,” or “to play a part.” It comes from ancient Greek theater. They did not use costumes and makeup as we do for plays. Instead actors would wear a mask that would represent the character that they were playing. They would “speak from underneath” the mask and “play a part.” And so the essence of being a hypocrite is wearing the mask of someone that we are not, and “speaking from underneath” that mask, and “playing a part” that is someone else’s life.

“Hypocrite” has a critical meaning, but it also has a positive application. Max Beerbohm, a British author, wrote a short story in 1897 entitled, **“The Happy Hypocrite.”** Here is how it goes.

It is a story of a man whose name was Lord George Hell, and he lived up to his name. Lord George is described in this story as being “a despicable man.” He was fond of drinking, gambling, womanizing and other such things.

One day, Lord George spotted a young woman whose name was Jenny, and he immediately fell in love with her and proposed to her. But she responded that she would only marry a man with the face of a saint.

So what does he do? Lord George goes to a store and buys a mask. It is the mask of the face of a saint. He wears that mask and he befriends Jenny. They fall in love and get married, and on the marriage register he changes his name from Lord George Hell to Lord George Heaven.

Their marriage is a very happy one. And he continuously wears that mask. Lord George gradually undergoes a moral conversion and he begins paying back money that he had stolen, and he donates generously to charities.

Then a woman from Lord George’s wicked past finds out what is going on and she wants to let Lord George’s wife know who he really is.

So this woman barges into their home and, in front of Lord George’s wife, rips off his mask. And to everyone’s surprise, the face underneath the mask was no longer the original face of Lord George. Rather, his face had become like the face of the saint whose mask he wore.

The intruder leaves, with the happy couple kissing, and the mask melting in the sun. **“The Happy Hypocrite”** – Lord George “played a part,” and the part became a part of him.

And isn't that what Saint Paul teaches us to do as followers, as disciples, of Jesus? In today's Second Reading he writes: **"It is due to God that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification and redemption"** [1 Corinthians 1: 30]. Saint Paul says, **"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ"** [Romans 13: 14]. **"And the life I live now is not my own. Christ is living in me... who loved me and gave Himself for me"** [Galatians 2: 20].

We should imitate Christ so that we begin to think with the mind of Christ, and to love with the heart of Christ – the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ.

So we ask Jesus to help us to be like Him as we live our lives publicly and privately. As parents and as priests, as teachers and as learners, to think with the mind of Christ, and to love with the heart of Christ. To imitate Jesus, our Master Teacher, by taking His words and His example into our hearts and lives.

Jesus teaches us, ***"Blessed are the clean of heart,"*** with His promise, ***"for they will see God."***