

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(1 Corinthians 1:26-31 / Matthew 5:1-12)
01.02.2026
The Beatitudes & St Brigid

The text of the Beatitudes from St Matthew's Gospel is well known. Every year we read it at least three times during Mass. It may be that for some of us the text has lost something of its sharpness and is no longer very incisive, cutting into the heart of our Christian identity.

Today we might need to experience anew the challenging aspect of the Beatitudes because as Pope Francis reminded us: "Jesus' Beatitudes (...) speak of a life that goes against the grain, a revolutionary life!" (*Hom. 01.11.2022*) "Unless Christians are revolutionaries they are not Christians. They must be revolutionaries" (*Address, 17.06.2013*)

The revolution that the Beatitudes map for us is, according to Pope Francis, "the revolution of love, the revolution of tenderness." (*Greetings, 13.12.2019*)

The expression "revolution of love and tenderness" goes against two temptations: first, the concept of revolution challenges our apathy, our longing for a cosy individualistic security, our desire to maintain the status quo and thereby to avoid engaging with the process of conversion; second, love and tenderness challenge our futile and dangerous attempts to make ourselves feel strong and secure by means of physical force, abusive and controlling behaviours, discrimination and humiliation.

As St Oscar Romero reminds us: "The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, (...), the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work." (27.11.1977)

So we have to be revolutionaries. There is no way we can remain neutral in face of injustice and wars; we cannot wash our hands as we see children, women and men not being respected in their dignity as children of the one Father.

Here it may be important to mention that the revolution does not concern only what is sinful in our societies, at political and economic levels. It is also about our Churches, and each one of us. In the Catholic Church, the synodal process is a call to conversion, change and renewal. Pope Francis described this process as follows: "The (...) Holy Spirit does not impose Himself by force but gently calls upon our affection and our freedom in order to shape us with patience and tenderness, and thus enable us to acquire the form of unity and communion that He desires in our relationships." (*Videomensaje con Motive de la Asamblea Plenaria de la Pontificia Comision para America Latina, 24-27.05.2022*)

For us Christians, the revolution which must begin in our hearts and then impact upon all our relationships, in society and in the fellowship of the Church, is truly and only a revolution of love and tenderness, a renewal in the foolishness that characterises God's plan as revealed in the Beatitudes. The Lord chooses the humble, those who are weak and unwise by human reckoning because ultimately, in faith, he knows that then we will rely on him and not on our own strength in order to build his Kingdom of love and peace among us.

Today in Ireland, we commemorate one woman who incarnated the Beatitudes: St Brigid of Kildare. She was, there is no doubt about it, a revolutionary in love and tenderness.

She was not afraid to challenge kings, clerics and wealthy men and women insofar as justice, generosity, kindness and respect were at stake. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we are told that "a column of fire" was burning above her head (*Vita Prima 1:74; 88:111*) and that she was "burning with the unquenchable fire of faith." (*Cogitatus 1:19*) This fire of faith made of her a revolutionary of love and tenderness.

St Brigid is famous for her generosity and hospitality to the poor. Today there is another aspect which could be highlighted: on many occasions St Brigid acted in favour of the liberation of slaves. She asked for their freedom and when it was refused she accomplished miracles which freed them.

In the UK, there are more than one hundred thousand victims of modern slavery (forced labour or human trafficking); we can add to this number those who are enslaved by all forms of addiction and those enslaved by fears and ideologies, hard-heartedness and judgemental attitudes, unforgiveness and bitterness.

Jesus was sent “to proclaim liberty to captives.” (Lk 4:18) This calling was at the heart of St Brigid’s ministry and it should be part of ours today. The Beatitudes of gentleness and mercy, which shine in the life of St Brigid, equip us today for the same work of liberation in our families and communities.

At the moment we hear a lot about threats of more conflicts in the world, of strong actions and nuclear responses; we hear political leaders claiming as theirs parts of other countries because of the security of their own homeland; and in all this, there are many religious people who feel the need to adhere to extreme ideologies. In this context, it is important for us to welcome again Martin Luther King’s words: “I am convinced that love is the most durable power in the world. (...) Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. (...) Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that.” (Art. 30.11.1957)

It is our duty and our responsibility to proclaim and to live the Beatitudes, to be heralds of a love that “is creative and redemptive”, a love that begets life and hope in a world which is tempted to despair. Pope Leo reminded us very clearly what our mandate is when he wrote: “The Church, if she wants to be Christ’s Church, must be a Church of the Beatitudes” (*Dilexi te*, n. 21, 04.10.2025)