

Good morning. Our topic today is **The Gospel of Matthew** and I would like to start with the Daily Prayer of the Order of Malta.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

“Lord Jesus, thou hast seen fit to enlist me for thy service in the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. I humbly entreat Thee, through the intercession of the most holy Virgin of Philermo, of St. John the Baptist, Blessed Gerard, and all the saints, to keep me faithful to the traditions of our Order:

**Be it mine to practice and defend the Catholic, the Apostolic, the Roman faith against sacrilege. Be it mine to practice charity towards my neighbors, especially the poor and sick.**

Give me the strength I need, to carry out this my resolve, forgetful of myself, **learning ever from Thy Holy Gospel a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion**, striving ever to promote God’s Glory, the world’s peace, and all that may benefit the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. Amen.”

Father, please heal those who are ill, especially our dear malades and malades in spirit, and Baby Matteo. And we ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.``

St. Jerome, Whose Memorial we celebrated yesterday, once said **that Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.**

As we all know, the Holy Gospel is our primary source of knowledge of the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew's Gospel is a splendid example of this.

Since we begin the Year of Matthew at Sunday Mass soon, it is helpful to have some background to his great work.

After the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, the Pharisees began to restructure Judaism. This resulted in the Jewish followers of Jesus being, in essence, excommunicated from Judaism. For example, they were being told that they could no longer attend Sabbath services in the local synagogues. This was very unsettling for the followers of Jesus,

because they considered themselves to be Jewish even though they had become followers of the Way, as the followers of Jesus were called initially. People were beginning to think that they had made a mistake in following Jesus and were becoming disenchanted with their new religion.

In his Gospel, Matthew, a “Jewish Christian”, attempts to reassure them that they have made the correct decision in following Jesus.

Since they are Jews, they grew up with the knowledge of God from studying the Torah on the sabbath days. They knew the story of Moses and the Exodus. They knew the Ten Commandments by heart and would have been familiar with prophets such as Isaiah as well as the Psalms. They were obedient to the Law but were missing something important. They knew the Law but they needed to be taught **how** to live out the Law.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus teaches them and us this in the Sermon On the Mount and specifically in the Beatitudes. In it, Our

Lord stresses that Forgiveness, reconciliation and mercy are the most important marks of the Church.

**The Sermon on the Mount** is recorded in chapters 5-7 in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus gave this teaching near the beginning of His ministry and it is the longest of Jesus' sermons recorded in the New Testament.

It is said that the Ten Commandments tell us **what** God wants us to do in our lives. Jesus tells us, in the Sermon on the Mount, **how** to live the life that God requires.

The Sermon on the Mount is not simply a list of rules to follow, it is an invitation to live a Christ-like life and thus enjoy the peace that comes from that. In short, Jesus is our model for living a life that is pleasing to God.

The Sermon begins with the eight Beatitudes. Beatitude means supreme happiness or bliss.

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit,** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Humility is realizing that all our gifts and blessings are given to us by God. There is nothing arrogant or self-righteous about someone who is truly humble. Furthermore, when we are humble, we acquire an inner peace that allows us to do the will of God.

**Blessed are they who mourn,** for they will be comforted.”God is always with us; we are never alone. Sometimes, we need to give our sadness and depression over to God. Let him handle it. It can be tough to be sad alone.

**Blessed are the meek,** for they will inherit the land. The land means the kingdom of Heaven. We should be even tempered,

patient and humble. Patience and humility are good virtues to practice.

**Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be satisfied. A righteous person lives according to God's will. We can help others to do this by setting a good example. By how we live our lives. When we help the poor and sick others will emulate us. Jesus wanted people to know that if they're willing to put in the time and effort to help others, He will support us.

**Blessed are the merciful**, for they will be shown mercy. God will have mercy on us if we show mercy to others. Like the phrase in the Our Father, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us..." those who are merciful to others (treat them with kindness and forgiveness) will be shown mercy.

**Blessed are the pure of heart**, for they will see God. St. Augustine explains, "A simple heart is a heart that is pure; and, just as the light which surrounds us cannot be seen except

through eyes that are clear, so neither is God seen unless that through which He can be seen is pure.” A pure heart is one that shows acts of love and mercy, and beats for righteousness and justice. There is no hatred or jealousy in a pure heart.

**Blessed are the peacemakers**, for they will be called children of God. Someone who helps make peace and helps others to get along is a peacemaker. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. God is the source of all peace and He empowers us to bring peace to others. We act as children of God when we try to reconcile with others.

**Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. A prime example of those who are *persecuted for the sake of what is right* are the saints and the martyrs, whom we celebrated yesterday. . All of us are called to be saints. And like the saints, when we suffer for Christ and others, the Kingdom of Heaven is our reward.

This is so true in our world today. Our Faith seems to be under attack in the Media and in Politics. Here in the United States, many have forgotten that we are supposed to be one nation under God.

However, there is hope:

Donald Trump spoke about Christianity on Monday, the feast day of Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael the archangels. He actually recited the prayer of St. Michael that we all said after Mass for many years. The President stated: .

“For 2,000 years, Christians have looked to Saint Michael the Archangel for protection, strength, and courage in times of conflict, distress, and doubt,”

Many parishes are again reciting this wonderful prayer composed by the last Pope Leo, Leo XII.



To continue: So, the Beatitudes tell us how we can live out the Ten Commandments. More specifically, how we can love God and love our neighbor.

**Jesus is the Face of The Beatitudes:** The simple teaching of The Beatitudes is that we should try to be like Jesus. He is the ultimate peacemaker, He has the purest heart, He is merciful, and most importantly, He suffered and died for us so that we can one day join him in Heaven! Achieving happiness in our lives is not easy, but Jesus showed us how to do it. All we have to do is follow him.

Three passages from the Gospel of Matthew should influence the Knights, Dames, Chaplains, and medical team of the order of Malta.

First of all:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

When we participate in the annual Pilgrimage to Lourdes, we are coming to Jesus through Mary asking our Lord to give us and our malades and their caregivers rest and healing.

Also, When we visit the homebound who perhaps cannot come to Mass, we are bringing the peace of Christ into their homes.

Another:

Then He \*said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." Matthew 9: 37=38

We are the workers God sends out to help in the harvest of souls.

We can do this by the example we set by our good works on behalf of the poor and the sick, as we state in our Daily Prayer of the Order.

However, we can help the sick when we pray for them. We can't all go to their homes but we can certainly pray for them in our own homes. Several times each week I bring Holy Communion to parishioners who can no longer attend Mass. Two are 103 years old and 97 respectively. Both were Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist who visited the sick in their homes and in a local nursing home when they were younger. They can no longer do that, but I always remind them that their prayers are what God wants from them at this stage of their lives. I suggest that they make it a daily practice to pray for the sick by name, relatives and friends.

Also, another verse:

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Matthew 25:40

There is a verse in Matthew chapter 10 that states:

The laborer deserves his keep. MT 10:10

If our “keep” or recompense for taking good care of the poor and the sick, the least of Jesus’ brethren, is the knowledge that we are doing what our Lord asks of us—then I think we are very well paid.

**Prayer** is essential for a true follower of Jesus and child of God.

We are all God’s children and he wants all of us to come home to him in Heaven some day. In order for us to accomplish this, we have to live the kind of life that our Father wants. This is not always easy, especially when there are so many temptations around us.

Popular media today seems to glamorize a lifestyle that is totally opposed to the way God wants us to live. Sex outside of marriage, drug or alcohol abuse and violence are shown as normal while religion and leading a good life according to God's law is shown as abnormal.

This is precisely why God sent Jesus to us. God always knows what we need, and we need Jesus in our life! Just as the world needed Jesus 2000 years ago, we need him here today. Jesus is our brother, our teacher, our best friend. He is the one we go to for advice, for help, or just to talk things over. Jesus is a faithful friend who will always forgive us, will never deny us, and will never leave us.

However, we must make the first move. It is up to us to approach God. He won't force himself on us. We have been given the gift of free will, and we have to decide for ourselves that we want to be a true child of God. He is patiently waiting for us to talk to him.

So how do we do this? How can we talk to someone we can't see with our eyes or hear with our ears or touch with our hands?

Well, it all comes down to prayer. Prayer is a conversation with God. When you love someone, you naturally want to talk, and prayer is how we talk to God.

We have prayers that we all have been saying all our lives. But Prayers that come from our hearts are all good. We can talk to God our Father just as we talk to each other. In turn, God responds to us in our hearts.

We can pray at any time: in the morning when we wake up or at night just before we go to bed. We can talk with Jesus as we are out walking, when we are riding in a car or on a bus. The best times for me are at bedtime and when I get up in the morning.

The key is to be open and honest with Jesus because he wants to help us. If we are not honest with Jesus we are also not honest with ourselves and he can't help us.

The trick is to be open to God and to avoid shutting him out.

Sometimes he will tell us things we don't want to hear, such as reconciling with someone who has hurt you.

That's the way Jesus is. He doesn't fight, he doesn't curse; He is nice to everyone. He just wants us to do two things:

1. Love God.
2. Love one another.

If we can try to accomplish these two simple things in our lives, we will be true friends of Jesus.

Jesus gave us one prayer, the Our Father or Lord's Prayer. And in it, as we read in Matthew, we say:

## Give us this day our daily bread. Matthew 6:9–13

In our time, bread is a commodity. There are hundreds of types and brands of bread available in the supermarket. But in Jesus' time, bread was truly the bread of life. It was made daily by the women of the household or community from wheat or barley flour in little stone ovens. The bread is what the people lived on. They might have had meat or fish on occasion, fruit and vegetable depending on the harvests. But that bread was the one constant source of nourishment for the people of that time.

Jesus uses that image of life sustaining bread to tell us to ask our Father directly each day for what we need. Not a loaf of Wonder bread but what we truly need. Just for that day.

We say these words in the Lord's Prayer, but they are also a guide for all our personal prayers to God. We should always remember to praise and thank God for all that he does for us. We should ask him for his help to get through our days. And ask for his protection against the evil in the world. He is our Father who



loves us and wants only the best for us. So let us conclude by praying the Lord's prayer together: