

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 30, 2005

Reflection by Sister Katherine Jean Cowan, OP

The poet T. S. Eliot echoed St. John of the Cross when he wrote:

In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is that of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are.

In the great feasts of Christmas and Epiphany that we have recently celebrated, we have seen these words lived out in the person of Jesus Christ, who came among us rejoicing in life and renouncing all things. He, who could have chosen any place, any time in history, any social or economic situation as the context of his life, chose the simplest and most humble of circumstances in which to be born, live and die.

Today as we come to Eucharist, we are challenged through the Beatitudes to make our own the life of our God made man. Books and articles have been written exploring the meaning of these eight statements, individually and collectively. These very familiar words take their credibility, however, not in the wisdom they offer, but in the example of Jesus who spoke them—and could speak them—because he lived them.

He who was poor in spirit (detached from all things), merciful, peace-filled, pure of heart, seeker of justice walked ahead of us in his compassionate and truth-filled way that he might ask us to follow.

We all have models, heroes/heroines that we look to for guidance and example. We choose to emulate these individuals because of the integrity of their lives; their words, elegant or pedestrian, ring true because of the lived example behind them.

Perhaps the best way to make the Beatitudes our own is to spend time during the coming days reflecting, not on the challenge posed to us through these words, but on Jesus and the way he embodied in this own life and death these statements that promise happiness in ways that often seem so ironic. In light of his life, we are given the strength to make the Beatitudes our path as well as his: for

In order to arrive at what [we] do not know
 [We] must go by a way which is that of ignorance.
In order to possess what [we] do not possess
 [We] must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what [we] are not
 [We] must go through the way in which [we] are.