

A Year of Hope: Living the Beatitudes Summary of Introductory Session: February 19, 2022

The focus group on Spirituality and JPIC convened a year long study entitled: A Year of Hope: Living the Beatitudes. Patricia Grace, OFS, and Donna Hollis, OFS, are the animators. We began on February 19, 2022 and intend to meet for an hour for the next nine months to read, reflect, pray, and discuss the eight Beatitudes as found in the Gospel of Matthew. We will finalize our year with a summary session in November.

On February 19, we began our session with our Franciscan ritual opening, since this was, indeed, a Franciscan fraternal gathering, simply in another form. After our ritual, Carolyn Townes, our National JPIC Animator, led us in prayer. We then sat in silence for a moment while we settled into the sacred space and prepared to begin our reflection. A short summary follows.

Patricia Grace led us in a reflection, setting the context for our year of prayer. One of the most basic and essential understandings from St. Francis is that life is all about love: Love the Lord, Love His Kingdom, Love the Earth. This understanding guides our lives and guides our work for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. When we embrace this understanding and reach for guidance, we encounter a loving Lord who reveals himself to us in nature, in the wisdom writings of the Church, in our Catechism, in our wonderful Rule and, most importantly, in scripture. Our beloved St. Francis called us to live our lives starting with the Gospel, then taking its message into our lives, and taking our lives back to the Gospel for deeper reflection and understanding.

Therefore, when we consider Hope, cultivating it, nurturing, and living in it, we go to the Gospel and there we find the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, found in the Gospel of Matthew 5: 3-12. There, the gospel sets forth eight blessings. We paused here in our discussion to reflect upon the word "Blessed." What does it mean? What did it mean to Jesus when he spoke it? What does it mean to us as we take it into our hearts, minds, and lives? Many thoughts were offered for translation including happy, joyful, loving, aligned with the will of God, to name a few. As we move through the year we will reflect on the essence of the word "Blessed" that resonates most strongly for each of us.

We recognized that although the Beatitudes are poetic and pious, their beauty and piety are found in their truth. They serve as the essence of our personal and spiritual development, the foundation for building harmony within our communities of family, fraternity, towns, and world, and our grounding of the concept of the common good. They teach us how to live in ever deepening faith and service, as we seek the vision of God's Kingdom on earth.

Each month over the next eight we will read and reflect upon one of the Beatitudes as part of our personal spiritual practice. We will join together, then, for an hour to share our developing understandings. Each session will begin in prayer, have a reflection, a discussion, and close in prayer. Different animators will lead each month. Patricia explained that you may join in as you wish and share as you feel called to share. You are always welcome.

Donna Hollis ended our time with a beautiful prayer and our Ritual Closing.

Peace and All Good,
Patricia Grace, OFS