

## Mission Statement

**Intro.** We live in an imperfect world. This is not breaking news. There have always been disasters; people who disrespect others, taking what is not theirs, including lives. There have been many attempts to create the perfect world. One approach is to see the world as irredeemable and to renounce all connections by going to some deserted place to live. Some are good ideas that work and some are terrible that cause more pain. In his first teaching we hear today, the Lord acknowledged the harsh reality of our world and presented some options.

**I.** The teachings we hear were spoken to people aware of how difficult daily life was. There was disease, evil spirit possession, hunger, poverty and little hope of things getting better for most people. The teaching must have sounded strange. It was not

a blessing to be poor or grieving or persecuted.

What the Lord offered through his mission was hope to reverse that. People who mourn will be comforted. People who are merciful will receive mercy instead of hate. Peacemakers and others who work for justice will find peace and justice.

Skepticism might have been running high in the crowd that day. It was a big plan. What the Lord proposed were principals and attitudes of his mission and of the people who followed him. He wanted to overturn the assumption that we must accept things the way they are or seem. Changing an imperfect world is difficult work. Ancient Greek philosophers and others often retreated from the world to think and pray. Some returned with ideas and practices that helped heal or at least, mitigate the imperfections of the world or people. Later,

religious people walked away from the world and attracted others to the lifestyle. Some lived alone as hermits while others lived in community in convents and monasteries. Some groups flourished and others fell apart in conflict. In our own times, various so-called leaders convince people to leave home and family, all trying to find or make a perfect world. It is an imperfect idea. But we keep trying.

**Concl.** The word “utopia” from Greek literally means “no place.” It is used to refer to an imaginary ideal place far away. Interestingly, I thought of the opening lines of some fairy tales: “In a galaxy far, far away.” The perfect place always seems to be somewhere else, not where we are living. From the same root word, its opposite is “*dystopia*,” an imaginary place which is “depressingly wretched and whose people lead a fearful existence.”

[Webster’s Dictionary] In all generations dystopian books and movies abound when the bad seems ready to overwhelm the good. In the Beatitudes, the Lord issued a challenge for the people then and for us today, to look beyond the imperfections of this world to that perfect place: life in God’s presence, we call it heaven. These are characteristics and attitudes of people who will inherit the kingdom of heaven and who try to live it here. It doesn’t mean none of these things can be accomplished or experienced here. We *can and do* comfort the sorrowful. We *can* be merciful, even to the unmerciful. We *can* work for justice and peace. It is not easy, but it is important that we try to create some experiences of what heaven may be like in our small part of the world, for ourselves and others. If not, life can be even more difficult. **The attitude of God’s followers is**

**the world IS holy and redeemable. We can**  
**witness to good rising above evil.**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

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