

THE GOOD SENSE OF JESUS

THE GOOD SENSE OF JESUS

A COMMENTARY ON
THE BEATITUDES

FR. IVÁN PERTINÉ

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Praise for *The Good Sense of Jesus*! Experience it and know Christ Jesus like never before!

The book *The Good Sense of Jesus* is very illuminating. I would highlight its distinctively Christian approach, the clear and decided proposal for the “life in Christ,” the presentation of the Beatitudes with its clarifying elucidations, the “Decalogue to achieve peace,” and the description of the faith as a response to a Presence.

—Daniel Cardinal Sturla, Archbishop of Montevideo, Uruguay

This is not a book to read quickly, nor one to read and set down. You won’t be able to. It is a book for praying, for dialoging with the Lord, and also for dialoging with the author from one’s own lived experience.

At the end of each talk or chapter, Father Iván leads you to enter your own interior world and offers opportune questions for assimilating the content and seeing where you stand spiritually.

I am certain that, once you’ve finished the book, you will experience with Father Pertiné that “the teaching of Christ is the most sensible, the most fitting for the human heart and the best response to our deepest desires . . .”

—Bishop Santiago Olivera,
Ordinary for the Military Services in Argentina
From the prologue to the original Spanish edition

These pages will show that Fr. Iván has clearly been “seized” by Christ. He is completely taken up with him and driven to share his love, to make him known. There is no greater happiness for human beings, no greater beatitude than Christ himself. “Blessed are those who know Christ!” this book wants to shout, wants to insist, wants to show the way.

—Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B.
Abbot of Mount Angel Abbey
Chancellor, Mount Angel Seminary
From the prologue to the English edition

I dedicate this book to all the members
of the Saint John Society.

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FOREWORD TO THE SPANISH EDITION

IN his introduction to this book, the author, Father Iván Pertiné, makes it clear that this work is the fruit of a retreat he preached to the priests of the Saint John Society, of which he is the general director.

That is why I don't need to speak about that in my prologue, but I do want to share my own experience of receiving this book and receiving at the same time the request to share with all of you what the reading has generated in me. And even though Fr. Iván explains that it was thought about, prayed about, and preached to the priests of the Saint John Society, the universality of what is Christian and Catholic can do great good for all members of the Church.

The Saint John Society is a Society of Apostolic Life born in the bosom of the Diocese of Cruz del Eje, the diocese for which I have had the joy of being pastor for the past eight years. This holy land is preparing to receive the first Argentine priest saint, of the diocesan clergy of Córdoba, our beloved Saint José Gabriel del Rosario (Saint Cura Brochero).

It is here, in this diocese, where the society's "missionaries took their first steps," approved by then-Bishop Omar Félix Colomé, and for this reason the link with the society has been one of esteem and closeness, from the time of its birth until now.

I thank Father Iván for asking me for this favor. As often happens, the favor was really for me. I began reading and finished reading, very much praying this book from the first pages.

Reading and praying about the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount in this year of mercy has been a very special grace.

This is not a book to read quickly, nor one to read and set down. You won't be able to. It is a book for praying, for dialoging with the Lord, and also for dialoging with the author from one's own lived experience.

At the end of each talk or chapter, Father Iván leads you to enter your own interior world and offers opportune questions for assimilating the content and seeing where you stand spiritually.

I am certain that, once you've finished the book, you will experience with Father Pertiné that "the teaching of Christ is the most sensible, the most fitting for the human heart and the best response to our deepest desires."

+SANTIAGO OLIVERA,

Bishop of the Diocese of Cruz del Eje, Córdoba, Argentina

FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

I am happy to introduce English readers to this book by Fr. Iván Pertiné, a book translated from the Spanish. It shares extensive meditations on the Beatitudes that Fr. Iván first prepared for members of the Society of Apostolic life of which he is the director, the Saint John Society. The Saint John Society was founded in Argentina, but it has subsequently expanded to Uruguay, the United States, and Italy.

I have known Fr. Iván and members of his society for some fifteen years now through their association with us at Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary. I came to know him as he has watched over the formation of students of the society who studied with us. I observed him with admiration as he and other members of the society worked in pastoral settings in the Archdiocese of Portland. During these years, my regard for him and the ideals of the society only grew. The members have a deep heart for the New Evangelization, and they very effectively call people to the Gospel, either for a first time or in renewal.

This is why I am happy that this book is available now to English-speaking readers. Although the conferences collected here are directed to priests of the Saint John Society, the reflections can be enriching for any reader, and they are a beautiful window into the spirit of this vigorous and energetic society. Access to the spirit of this society is why

this book is important. By following Fr. Iván's conferences, the reader can enter into the details of how the society's members are formed: how they think, how they pray, what they learn to care about, and how they increase their zeal. Preaching the Gospel not only with words but with the authenticity of one's own life is a very serious undertaking. And here we see Fr. Iván challenging the brothers of his society to the continual conversion that is required of disciples of Christ and servants of the Gospel. Now, by means of this book, this serious effort by the members of the society can become an example and stimulus for others.

The meditation on each beatitude is extensive. The words of Jesus are meditated on in their own right, but then they are explored with many styles of further reflection by Fr. Iván. For example, he may share his own or others' struggles with what Jesus is saying. He works through these and shows a way forward. He brings rich texts from past and present to bear on the different beatitudes—in one moment Chrysostom or Ambrose or Augustine and in another Pope Francis or Pope John Paul or Newman or Aquinas. This wide-ranging drawing on the richness of others is typical of the Saint John Society. These are the ingredients of what I noted there is to emulate in them: how they are formed, how they think, how they pray, what they learn to care about, and how they increase their zeal. All this is shared now beyond the society and with the reader of this book.

It is not difficult to detect in what one reads here that the original setting for this material was live conferences from the director of the Saint John Society to his brother members. This suggests a way to use the book. It probably will not be too helpful to just settle in and read it straight

through. Rather, I would suggest using it as workbook. It would be best to read slowly, not too much at once, and then plan some time for prayer and thought afterwards. This is the way that Fr. Iván is conducting the retreat, aware that his brothers in the society are framing his conferences with their own prayer and reflection. I'm suggesting that a reader do the same. Every beatitude is concluded with proposed exercises. I'm sure that many readers would profit from following through on these as well.

These pages will show that Fr. Iván has clearly been "seized" by Christ. He is completely taken up with him and driven to share his love, to make him known. There is no greater happiness for human beings, no greater beatitude than Christ himself. "Blessed are those who know Christ!" this book wants to shout, wants to insist, wants to show the way.

ABBOT JEREMY DRISCOLL, OSB
Abbot of Mount Angel Abbey
Chancellor, Mount Angel Seminary

INTRODUCTION

THIS book was born from a retreat that I preached for the priests of the Saint John Society. The proposed topics were the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. Well aware of the challenge of presenting these chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, I dedicated a year to praying with these texts and to reading different studies and commentaries about them.

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the passages of the Word with the most commentaries, from the Fathers of the Church until today. It is in some way beyond our grasp; it won't allow itself to be domesticated or reduced to an idea in a manual. Rather, it has life and dynamism, and it asks us to question ourselves and awakens in us a deep desire to live as it suggests: totally before God, free from unnecessary attachments, and completely given over to the mission to which we have been called.

I preached these reflections as a retreat to priests, and later—with a few adaptations—to different groups of lay people in Argentina, in Uruguay, and in the United States. Finally, I preached it to the missionaries of the Saint John Society, who, while studying philosophy, are preparing to become priests at the service of the New Evangelization.

In each of these retreats, my comprehension of the text grew richer from the experience of so many people who, each in their own place and context, strive to be faithful

to the teachings of Jesus and to live this Word with evangelical radicalism. For this reason, these pages are in a way written a little by all of them and are born from the back and forth both with God in prayer and with my brothers as I preached to them and listened to their life experiences.

These reflections were first a simple written text that was later preached and finally transcribed. This explains the oral style of these pages. These are talks that were given live; therefore, the transcriptions are agile and informal in their expression so that reading them is like conversing with friends. I decided it was best to conserve this oral rhythm because it expresses the communitarian dynamism in which these reflections began to take form, and because it is an invitation to the reader to “sit for a retreat” and participate in it as another retreatant.

Naturally, since this book is the version of the retreat preached to the missionaries, the readers will encounter allusions to the Saint John Society, to its constitutions, to consecrated life, to the challenge of the New Evangelization, and to some circumstances of the recent history of the birth of this Society of Apostolic Life.

This is written as a retreat for men who want to consecrate themselves to Christ in the Saint John Society. But I believe much of what is shared here can be profitably read by all and adapted to the personal circumstances of each reader, because those who are called to follow Christ in his public life through the streets of the Galilees of today aren't made of different material but rather are “taken from among men”¹ for his service. And because Christ is a man

¹ Heb 5:1.

among men, he can “deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness.”² That which is useful for some is useful for all, and vice versa, if it is read with faith and in prayer.

This leads me to make a suggestion: at the end of each chapter, there is an exercise, a proposal for prayer with the Beatitudes and with the Sermon on the Mount. I make a heartfelt invitation that you complete these exercises so as to configure yourself to Christ and experience in your life “the glorious freedom of the children of God.”³

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compares the man who listens to his teaching and puts it into practice to a wise man who knew how to build solidly: “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.”⁴ And he contrasts the wise man with the fool, who listened but did not practice, and so built on the sand, and the house collapsed in the storm. The comparison is suggestive. Listening and putting what we hear into practice is the most sensible option, which allows us to build and to orient our lives according to the criteria of the Gospel.

Often, it is said that living the Gospel is very difficult. In reality, I believe that it is the easiest thing, in the long run. It is difficult to live without God, seeking blindly and alone. It is easier to listen to the Gospel, to belong to a Christian community, to walk with others, and to benefit from the

² Heb 5:2.

³ Rom 8:21.

⁴ Mt 7:24–25.

wisdom of the Church. It is difficult to be alone, and it is difficult, because of its mid- and long-range consequences, to live in submission to one's own passions and the pressure of the criteria of this world. In contrast, life is easier and simpler when I am capable of entrusting myself to the Word, struggling against myself, and so advancing in the interior freedom that allows me to love more deeply. It is true that doing so implies a free choice. The Word of Jesus does not appeal to what is most superficial or instinctive but rather to the deepest level, the most personal and free, where we make our decisions. But it is also true that the one who has taken this step begins to experience that the teaching of Christ is the wisest course, the most fitting for the human heart, and the one that best responds to our deepest desires and to our common sense. *His teaching is wise, and it makes us wise.* So everyone who practices the Sermon on the Mount, with the grace of God, enters into the paths of Christian wisdom and recovers the good sense which comes from having the fundamental existential coordinates; that is, we are children of the Father, we have been and are loved by God, we are pilgrims headed to heaven, we have to sow while there is time and also cultivate a fraternal life, of this life we will only bring with us what we have given, and so on.

“May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you many know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might.”⁵

⁵ Eph 1:17–19.