

A banner with a quote and a drawing. The quote is in white cursive on a dark background. To the right is a yellow drawing of a heart with the words 'PEACE' and 'HAPPINESS' written around it.

*"Guard your heart,
for everything you do,
flows from it.*

~ Proverbs 4:23

Controlling Your Emotions

Read: Matthew 5:1-12

On a very cold day in February 2004, I stepped into St. Michael's church to grab something from my office. I returned to my car only to find the window broken and the stereo gone. In shock I checked to make sure the other valuables had not been taken. Then I discovered my rosary, a sentimental gift, was missing. At this point the shock wore off and I was confronted with two very powerful but conflicting emotions: anger and mercy. I had a choice to make.

In the gospel we hear Jesus recite the Beatitudes, eight life lessons to keep us on the path of happiness. But what strikes me about the Beatitudes is that they are specific emotional responses to different situations. Our emotions can dictate whether a situation will leave us miserable or happy. But we can choose our emotional response. Instead of cursing out the individual who broke into my car I had the opportunity to offer the culprit mercy through my prayers. I could let go of the anger or just let it eat away at me.

When Jesus recited the Beatitudes he was essentially saying that in all of life's circumstances we have a choice when it comes to our emotional response. Scripture says that we "are defiled by the words that come out of our mouth" Matthew 15:11. What we say and what we do are expressions of how we feel. We can't control our emotions but we can control how we express them.

The Beatitudes remind us that true happiness does not come from giving into every desire and emotion that we feel. Rather, happiness comes to us when we are in control of our emotions and therefore in control of our situation. The Beatitudes remind us that: humility trumps pride; we need to be grateful for what we have; a gentle spirit calms a difficult situation; we can work charitably towards justice; mercy dissipates anger; selflessness leads to generosity; a peaceful heart is a happy heart; turning the other cheek is the first step towards resolving conflict.

The Beatitudes are basically God's plan for a healthy and happy life. But we have to check our emotions because they can cause us to take the wrong path. As Proverbs says, "Guard your heart for everything you do flows from it" (4:23). From the heart flows all things, if we choose God's path our life will truly be "blessed".

Reflection: Which Beatitude do I need to work on? How can I better control my emotions the next time I find myself in a challenging situation?