Back in November of last year, Pope Francis proposed these six new Beatitudes for modern Christians to “recognize and respond to new situations with fresh energy.”

New commitment and new energy from modern Christians. Did I just hear someone ask “What’s a modern Christian?” Well to answer that question - as well as build a foundation for reflecting on today’s words from Scripture – let’s compare and contrast life as we journey from here in the US to the Mediterranean society of Biblical times.

People in today’s modern world are surrounded by a competitive and industrial economy “and all that goes with it, such as labor, production, consumption and possessions.” These things motivate people’s behaviors and claim their energy and time.

We see this is in today’s focus on quantity-orientated measures of success: People consciously - and unconsciously - seeking control over their lives and work, social, and even recreational environments.
Their measures of success, their accomplishments, may include the accumulation of wealth; the number of resorts or countries visited, mountains climbed, racks hanging on the wall - even the number of head turns from good looks, tattoos, or other beauty or fashion statements.

But in the first century Mediterranean world, most people were involved in agriculture. This economy reflected a recognition of limited resources and behaviors founded in divine inheritance and divine gift. Society did not measure success their belongings or accomplishments. For example, those who tried to accumulate wealth were suspected of doing it at the expense of the group to which they belonged. You see the people of the Biblical world thought of themselves as belonging to households. There they found honor, meaning, motivation, happiness, and comfort in their struggles. ²

My brothers and sisters, today we find ourselves confronted by a “control or be controlled”, success-oriented, value system that looks nothing like the Mediterranean culture whose people surrounded Jesus in silence to hear his Beatitudes. I suspect this is why, through the grace of God, our Holy Father, has gifted us with six new beatitudes for today’s encounters.

So where does this leave us with Jesus’ beautiful Beatitudes, teachings offered to a culture having societal values far different from ours? How are we faithful modern Christians to realize and actualize their qualities and behaviors? How can we be weak, meek, and poor in spirit when our modern world places such high value on control and success?

Well it’s important to know that our Christian ancestors faced similar struggles. Yes, they saw first-hand their savior crucified by the Roman Empire, crushed in brutal fashion, and left to die powerless on the cross. They saw the Roman authorities in control and destined to succeed. Their commitment to God, their willingness to evolve and adapt, could not get past that moment.

(POINT TO CROSS)

That moment at which God’s own son, our Savior is revealed

That moment at which God’s wholly wisdom and will are revealed

That moment at which strength measured by human standards is found to be utterly bankrupt.

To see the cross for what it truly was and is, we must look at it from God’s divine perspective. He doesn’t act by human rules, and we can’t look at weakness from a human perspective. God turns the meaning of life inside out.
And so it is that I stand before you - with our majestic crucifix and the crucified one behind me - preaching Christ and Christ crucified!

This is the essence of the Beatitudes, those words proclaimed by the “gentle and humble in heart” in the stillness to those on the hill, and to us in the stillness of this sanctuary. Being crucified!

Happiness, joy, peace, whatever you want to call it... life is found when we let go and follow the way of Christ all the way to the cross.

Become part of the remnant that the Prophet Zephaniah speaks of:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{a people humble and lowly,} \\
\text{who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD...} \\
\text{They shall do no wrong and speak no lies;} \\
\text{nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue...} \\
\text{none shall disturb them.}\n\end{align*}\]

Set aside the values and judgments on education, human wisdom, knowledge, possessions - none of it has value in God’s eyes. Look at people and situations through different eyes – eyes of the divine – eyes within the heart. Walk by faith & experience blessings in humility, in mourning, and in weakness. Walk by faith with a pure heart and see God above everything. Walk by faith and with every breath taken will come the realization that everything we have is God’s.

The almighty will give us all we need - not because we’re a self-made man or a self-made woman, but because God cares about God-made men and God-made women. Strength will come in ways unimagined to pass by the riches of this world and yet be as gentle as a feather. And we need not mourn for those who suffer by God’s justice. Instead let us seek eternal comfort in mourning for the sin of others as well as our own, and for those who have been treated unjustly.

If we want to experience God here and now, let us boast in the Lord for what we have been gifted! Share now in the glory of Christ by going beyond the commandments to experience blessings in humility, in mourning, and in weakness. He is waiting for us with arms wide open to accept the gift of faith not through “great deeds and extraordinary events” but simple “daily fidelity to the demands of our baptism.”

My brothers and sisters: “The Beatitudes are our path, our goal, our native land. The Beatitudes are the way of life that the Lord teaches us, so that we can follow in his footsteps.”

The reward of salvation is here and the heavenly riches which come in eternal life!

Let us rejoice and be glad!
1 http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/pope-francis-proposes-6-new-beatitudes-to-confront-todays-troubles

2 The ancient Mediterranean values of honour and shame as a hermeneutical procedure: A social-scientific criticism in an African perspective. E Mahlangu (University of Pretoria). 

3 New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), 1 Corinthians 1:23

4 New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), Matthew 11:29

5 New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), Zephaniah 3:12-13

6 https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/sermon-95-on-the-beatitudes-st-leo/