

The Beatitudes Matthew Chapter 5:1-12

For Christians, the beatitudes affirm the deepest longings of the human heart for a simple life, for love, forgiveness, peace and holiness and they are Jesus' assurance that these longings will be completely satisfied. Completely satisfied.

The life of Sr. Regine Donner is a testimony to this power of God's grace as manifested in the life of a soul who simply opened her heart to those around her – regardless of any distinctions that human beings might try to create. Of how the Lord fulfilled his promises to her and will fulfill his promises to all of us who seek to live the beatitudes.

As background to the fulfillment of the Beatitudes in the life of Sr. Regine I need to give you some context.

The first Third of her life (from 1928 to 1958) was spend in Europe, at first as a child she lived with her family in Poland and then when she was 5 they moved to Belgium. Her father was Ari and mother Sabine, her older sister Clara and brothers David and Israel and her younger brother, Henri, who was born in Belgium in 1933. When she was 11 the Second World War began and by the time she was 13 the Nazis had invaded Belgium and her family had to flee but there was no escape. The family was separated from one another. She experienced the **poverty of spirit** of those who understand our powerlessness.

Her sister Clara, who was 25, and her husband were arrested and sent to a camp Aushwitz. Where eventually they were gassed. Her brother Israel was caught and sent to Buchenwald. You can imagine the **mourning** of Regine and her parents. Her oldest brother David left the family in Belgium and went into hiding and eventually made his way into France and joined the Jewish underground resistance during the war. But the rest of the family was assisted by the local Belgian Catholic families who formed the underground resistance there. These people hardly knew the Donner's. In retrospect, Regine came to recognize the Lord fulfilling his promise of in the beatitudes to comfort those who mourn. Those Christians, who were risking their own lives and the lives of their families, were instruments of the **comfort** the Lord promised would come to those who mourn.

To help Regine's mother and father one family the Hanquet family took Regine into hiding while her father and mother fled to Paris with their youngest child Henri who was only 8 years old. But in Paris things did not go well and Ari had to leave Sabine

and Henri with other refugees in hiding. When Regine learned of the situation she asked to be allowed to go to Paris to get her mother and brother. The Hanquet's made some arrangements and Regine, a 14 year old girl set off for Paris by train unaccompanied except for the Lord's protection. In Paris, she was met by a man at the train who brought her to the place where the refugee were hiding. She didn't see the man again but she led her mother and little Henri back to the train station and brought them to the home of the Hanquets, trusting that they would assist her and they did. They took her mother into hiding and found a nearby family the Alardos where Henri could stay. To his dying day in 2014 Henri's love for Regine and his admiration for her courage would shape both of their lives.

You see the beatitudes are not just manifested in the life of Regine – we know her as **“Meek”** and **“Poor in Spirit”** as one who **Hungered for holiness** but she came to see that the Lord fulfilled his beatitudes through the lives of those who touched her life.

It was during these war years that, through the love and faith of the Hanquet family, the Lord began to call her. Her mother was diagnosed with liver cancer soon after returning to Belgium and Regine watched her mother die. The Hanquet's “adopted” her into their hearts and she experience, in the midst of her mourning, the comfort of the Kingdom the Lord promised in his beatitudes. As she would tell us, they became **her second family** and many times over the years since then, she called and visited them. Even to the last few days before her death she spoke by phone with them and the younger generation of Hanquet's – her “nieces” and “nephews”.

Through them she began to hunger for that holiness the Lord speaks of in his beatitudes. She responded to his grace by asking to be baptized. The war was in full fury, she was now 15, but she was older than her years. And so, the Hanquets supported her request and she entered the Church – the Kingdom of God here on earth and the beatitudes were fulfilled. Henri wanted to follow Regine into the Church but the Alardos felt that at 10, he was too young to make such a decision.

When the war ended her father Ari and brother David returned to Belgium and found Regine and Henri. They wanted them to join them and go to Palestine as a part of the Zionist exodus. Regine told them she had become a Christian and she would stay in Belgium. Her father and brother took Henri and refused to have any further contact with her. But the relationship between Regine and Henri would last the rest of their lives.

It was for her a kind of second persecution. First she had been persecuted for being a Jew, now she suffered a kind of “persecution” for having accepted Christ into her life. She was still a Jew but she was also a Christian. Jesus in the Beatitudes speaks of the

price we may have to pay on account of his name. Regine knew the pain of this beatitude until 1971, when through the work of Henri she traveled to Israel and she and her father and brothers were reconciled just before her father's death. They came to accept that she had to walk her own path. Her brother, Henri, was the Lord's peacemaker of the Beatitudes. And the Lord's peace brought healing to her soul and, though in 2014 she mourned Henri's death, she was confident in faith that he is one of the beatitude's peacemakers, one of the children of God.

But during those intervening years between the end of the war and that reconciliation, her decision to accept Christ had begun for her a new and second part of her life in which the Beatitudes continued.

After the chaos of the war subsided, her hunger for holiness, the hunger the Lord speaks of in the Beatitudes, continued to grow in her soul. She followed that hunger and entered the Daughters of Mary and Joseph in 1954. The sisters became her **third family**. The Lord's beatitudes promised that those who hunger for holiness would be satisfied and though the fullness of the satisfaction He promises is now her in Heaven, He began the fulfillment of that promise in her life through her sisters in the daughters of Mary and Joseph. For 25 years she ministered with her sisters in Africa: Burundi, Uganda and Nigeria and for the last 33 years here in California.

Sr. Regine was sent to an outpost on the edge of the civilized world, Santa Maria, and in poverty of spirit she accepted the assignment and here she found, just as the Lord had promised in the Beatitudes, the Kingdom of Heaven. She found a guardian angel a "soul mate", Sr. Shelia Tellis, whose extrovert personality was a perfect match for hers. They became the dynamic duo – like Batman and Robin. And those of us who had the joy of being caught up in their energy and creativity will never forget the experience. Regine was adopted by Sheila's sisters: Diane and Susan and by the family of St. Joseph High School - a fourth and fifth families. She told me that everywhere along the path of her life the Lord provided families for her.

For ten years we watched the show, one colorful adventure after another and then that beatitude of mourning made its appearance again. Shelia was diagnosed with cancer, Regine resigned from teaching to care for her – Blest are the merciful, they will be shown mercy. And the Lord fulfilled his promise. After Sheila's death waves of mercy filled Regine's life. Regine didn't drive and so Ginny Cronomiz and a whole battalion of friends would take her wherever she needed to go. Her sisters, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph made community arrangements so that she could stay up here in this outpost with her Santa Maria family – another waves of His Mercy. Sr. Janet Corcoran took Regine under wing and encouraged her to start a program at

Marian Hospital for high school student volunteers and so Volunteer was born. Waves of mercy. The medical community in Santa Maria took her to their heart with a tenderness of care that she saw as a manifestation of their love and the Lord's merciful love. Here, in Santa Maria, she experienced the outskirts of Kingdom of Heaven that He promised in the Beatitudes. She returned to teaching where she was embraced on a daily basis by her St. Joseph family. Where Ron Crest and others would make sure she got from the school to the Marian Medical Center in the afternoon. And in these most recent years the loving ministry of Sr. Catherine attending to every detail. Regine clearly recognized that she was surrounded by the presence of the Lord and his mercy. The loving mercy she had shared with her students in Africa, with her family at St. Joseph High School and with Sheila in her difficult time – the Lord showed to her in super-abundance in a hundred different ways. Even in the merciful way He let her leave this world. Coming to her through a personal experience of his presence in a dream on the Monday before her death, telling her that she had, "Nothing to fear."

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Blessed are the merciful

Blessed are the peacemakers

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness

Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness

And in Chapter 10 of Mark's gospel -

The Lord says,

Truly I say to you,

there is no one who has left houses or brothers or sisters

or mother or father or children

for My sake and for the sake of the gospel,

but that they will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age,

houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children,

along with persecutions;

and in the age to come eternal life.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.