

The Sermon on the Mount



Sermon on the Mount

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²³ And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decap'olis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. (Matt 4:23-25)

The Sermon on the Mount

Part I: The Beatitudes

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Church of the Beatitudes

The site upon which the Church of the Beatitudes is generally agreed upon by scholars as being the location where Jesus delivered His Sermon on the Mount. Located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee the hilltop overlooks the lake, and many of the sites where Jesus performed miracles and taught including Caper’na-um, and the Feeding of the 5000. It is also believed to be the site where Jesus commissioned His disciples to “makes disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:16-20). This site would have provided ample space for a large crowd to gather and listen to Jesus’ teaching. Historical and archeological evidence also supports the claim that this is the authentic site of the teaching of the Beatitudes. The journal of a 4th century Christian pilgrim, Egeria, describes a location “upon which the Lord ascended when he taught the Beatitudes” as being near a cave in the hillside at the Seven Springs, near Tabgha. Archeological excavations have uncovered a cave at the site as well as the ruins of an ancient Byzantine church nearby.



Construction on The Church of the Beatitudes was completed in 1938. The main church has an octagonal structure representing the eight Beatitudes. Eight stained-glass windows each record a Beatitude in Latin. The style of the church is Neo-Byzantine meaning that shares some of the architectural features of the Byzantine churches including the domed roof and mosaic.





Commentary on the Beatitudes

1. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

To be poor in spirit is to recognize clearly that one has nothing which he has not received from God, that one is nothing except by the grace of God. This blessed poverty is called “spiritual” in Saint Matthew’s Gospel because, first of all, it is an attitude of mind and heart, a conviction of the soul. It is the condition of man in total emptiness and openness before God, primarily in relation to the things of the Spirit, that is, to understanding and insight, to will and desire.

To be poor in spirit is to be devoid of all pride and trust in the power of one’s own spirit. It is to be freed from all reliance on one’s own ideas, opinions and desires. It is to be liberated from the “vain imaginations” of one’s own heart (Jer 23.17, Rom 1.21). For as the holy Virgin Mary, the perfect model of poverty in spirit, has sung in her magnificent song:

*God has shown strength with His arm,
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
And has exalted the humble and meek,
He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He has sent away empty. (Lk 1.51–54).*

<https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-beatitudes/poverty-in-spirit>

2. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted—This "mourning" must not be taken loosely for that feeling which is wrung from men under pressure of the ills of life, nor yet strictly for sorrow on account of committed sins. Evidently it is that entire feeling which the sense of our spiritual poverty begets; and so the second beatitude is but the complement of the first. The one is the intellectual, the other the emotional aspect of the same thing. It is poverty of spirit that says, "I am undone"; and it is the mourning which this causes that makes it break forth in the form of a lamentation—"Woe is me! for I am undone." Hence this class are termed "mourners in Zion," or, as we might express it, religious mourners, in sharp contrast with all other sorts (Isa 61:1-3; 66:2). Religion, according to the Bible, is neither a set of intellectual convictions nor a bundle of emotional feelings, but a compound of both, the former giving birth to the latter. Thus closely do the first two beatitudes cohere. The mourners shall be "comforted." Even now they get beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Sowing in tears, they reap even here in joy. Still, all present comfort, even the best, is partial, interrupted, short-lived. But the days of our mourning shall soon be ended, and then God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. Then, in the fullest sense, shall the mourners be "comforted." (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary on Matt 5:4, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/5-4.htm>)

3. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

By their nature the beatitudes are oriented toward practice; they call for imitation, they accentuate the work of man. There is the danger that we will become discouraged in experiencing an incapacity to put them to practice in our own lives, and by the great distance between the ideal and the practice.

We must recall to mind what was said at the beginning: The beatitudes are Jesus' self-portrait. He lived them all and did so in the highest degree; but — and this is the good news — he did not live them only for himself, but also for all of us. With the beatitudes we are called not only to imitation, but also to appropriation. In faith we can draw from the meekness of Christ, just as we can draw from his purity of heart and every other virtue. We can pray to have meekness as Augustine prayed to have chastity: "O God, you have commanded me to be meek; give to me that which you command and command me to do what you will." (from the Lenten sermon delivered by Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa: <https://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/zmeek.htm>)

4. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Man's life consists in seeking, in hungering and in thirsting for righteousness. This is the spiritual teaching of the scriptures and the saints. The satisfaction and rest comes from God, but is a satisfaction and rest which itself always and for eternity becomes the basis of a new hunger and thirst. This is not in contradiction to Christ's teaching that "he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (Jn 6.35). It is rather the affirmation that the "inquiet" of man's heart, as Saint Augustine (5th c.) has said, is created "toward God," and that the "rest" which is found in Him is itself, as Saint Maximus (7th c.) has said, an "ever-dynamic rest," always growing and developing in ever greater union with the uncontainable and inexhaustible richness and fullness of divine being and life. (<https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-beatitudes/mercy>)

5. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Christ revealed God as absolute mercy. He came to die for us and cancel the debt of sin, which we were unable to pay. The Latin word for mercy is *misericordia* (miser, cor, dia). The word means "the heart (cor) of God (deus) touching our misery (miser). God enters into our misery by becoming man in the Person of Christ. He does so to inject the comfort of his presence into the depths of our darkness so that when life becomes dark for us, we do not have to suffer alone. When we have been touched by his mercy, we too become merciful; to follow him is to become a channel of his mercy. (<https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-beatitudes-a-concise-summary.html>)

6. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

To seek but one thing, the face of the Lord, is purity of heart. To will but one thing, the light of the Lord in the depth of one's soul, is to live in utter purity. It is for this reason that Christ's mother Mary is the image of perfect purity. The holy Virgin is "all-pure" not merely because of her bodily continence, but also because of her spiritual soundness. Her heart was pure. Her mind was sane. Her soul magnified the Lord. Her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. Her body was His spiritual temple. For this reason God regarded her humility and did great things for her. For this reason all generations call her blessed. For this reason she is "full of grace" and the Lord is with her. For she, in her simple purity, could say to God: "Let it be to me according to Your word" (Luke 1). (<https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-beatitudes/purity-in-heart>)

7. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

The Latin word for peace is 'pax', which means unity. As Ezekiel prophesied, the Lord will gather his people together from all nations; for love unites, hate divides. A peacemaker is one who strives to bring together, to maintain a genuine harmony among people. A peacemaker is not a "peacenik"; rather, he is one who is willing to 'make' peace, to work for it, even to fight for it. An unjust aggressor, which might include an entire nation, is intent on destroying the peace; so a true peacemaker is even willing to take up arms and fight, perhaps die for the pax of the nation, as our war veterans have done. So there is no requirement that one become a pacifist if one is a Christian.

Gossipers are not peacemakers, but love scandal and division. Controllers too are not peacemakers; for the controller desires to gather into a unity, but one that is under his control and that he can manage. He attempts to order everything for the sake of securing a safe environment for himself. If the controller is a priest or bishop, he may betray the duties of his office by refusing to speak out when necessary, by remaining silent on difficult moral matters because he loves his own "peace of mind" more than he loves the good of the flock. He may be tempted to rationalize his silence under the pretext of being a "peacemaker", that is, one who does not wish to "divide", an attitude contrary to Christ: "Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword" (Mt 10, 34).

The true peacemaker, however, is not an "organizer", but an instrument in the hands of Christ who orders and "brings together" in ways that are beyond our comprehension at the moment. It is only much later, when looking back, that we see that what appeared to be a life characterized by unintelligible randomness was really an ordered movement towards the realization of the larger plan of divine providence. (by Deacon Douglas McManaman, *The Beatitudes: A Concise Summary*, <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-beatitudes-a-concise-summary.html>)

8. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake...—How entirely this final beatitude has its ground in the Old Testament, is evident from the concluding words, where the encouragement held out to endure such persecutions consists in its being but a continuation of what was experienced by the Old Testament servants of God.

But how, it may be asked, could such beautiful features of character provoke persecution? To this the following answers should suffice: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." "The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." "There is yet one man (said wicked Ahab to good Jehoshaphat) by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil" (Joh 3:20; 7:7; 15:19; 2Ch 18:7). But more particularly, the seven characters here described are all in the teeth of the spirit of the world, insomuch that such hearers of this discourse as breathed that spirit must have been startled, and had their whole system of thought and action rudely dashed. Poverty of spirit runs counter to the pride of men's heart; a pensive disposition, in the view of one's universal deficiencies before God, is ill relished by the callous, indifferent, laughing, self-satisfied world; a meek and quiet spirit, taking wrong, is regarded as pusillanimous, and rasps against the proud, resentful spirit of the world; that craving after spiritual blessings rebukes but too unpleasantly the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; so does a merciful spirit the hard-heartedness of the world; purity of heart contrasts painfully with painted hypocrisy; and the peacemaker cannot easily be endured by the contentious, quarrelsome world. Thus does "righteousness" come to be "persecuted." But blessed are they who, in spite of this, dare to be righteous.

...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven—As this was the reward promised to the poor in spirit—the leading one of these seven beatitudes—of course it is the proper portion of such as are persecuted for exemplifying them. (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary on Matthew 5:10, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/5-10.htm>)

Reflections on the Beatitudes

Kevin's Reflection: *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

"All I see is pure lines," exclaimed the student looking through the microscope. This was a statement I heard many times from my Junior High School biology students when I taught science in East Los Angeles. They were, of course, seeing the reflection of their eyelashes in the eyepiece of the microscope. What struck me was the usage of the word "pure." In my thinking "pure" had to do with a state of moral being; without sin and holy, like the Virgin Mary. My students were using the word "pure" in a different way, as in "made up of just one thing," or "not mixed with something else." It made sense; they were telling me that all they saw were lines (eyelashes) and nothing else, and certainly not what I had told them they would be seeing (probably cells). I believe both of these uses of the word "pure" are appropriate when considering what Jesus said regarding the "pure of heart."

Let's begin with the idea of pure as meaning "made up of just one thing" or "unmixed." The "pure in heart" have an "unmixed" heart, the *want* of their hearts is "made up of just one thing"—Jesus; all other wants are ordered around this central and primary *want*.

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sad'ducees, they came together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. (Matt 22: 34-38)

If one of my former students were to rephrase the first two commandments he or she might have said, "A pure heart is made up of only one thing, *love* of God. This is the primordial and sometimes unknown *want* that God instilled into our hearts, or as Saint Augustine said, "*Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.*" Once found, the heart (spirit) marshals the whole person, body, soul, and spirit to unite herself with the Subject of her desire, the Bridegroom. What incomparable joy it is when the Bridegroom and the Bride see one another:

Bride: The sound of my lover! Here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills.

⁹ My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. See! He is standing behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices.

¹⁰ My lover speaks and says to me,

Bridegroom: “Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come!

¹¹ For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone.

¹² The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the turtledove is heard in our land.

¹³ The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come!

¹⁴ My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, Let me see your face, let me hear your voice, For your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” (Song of Solomon 2:8-14)

What a beautiful description of the Bride and the Bridegroom seeing each other. This is the romance of Christ and His Church; the Beatific Vision of God reserved for the pure in heart. Is this only for heaven? I don't think so. I'll go so far as to say that we need this vision, this seeing of God now. Why? It is in seeing our Beloved that our longing for Him grows all the more stronger, our hearts more singular in their attractions for Him, and the more *like Him* we become, for as the Apostle whom Jesus loved said,

² Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (John 3:2-3)

What could be more purifying than seeing Him? When we see God we see ourselves in the light of His glory. Consider the account of the Prophet Isaiah encounter with the Lord of Hosts:

In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isaiah 6:1-4)

What was Isaiah's response to this glorious vision?

⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5)

This is the right response, the only appropriate response to being in the presence of God. This was Saint Peter's response after witnessing the the miracle Jesus performed:

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” ⁹ For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken... (Luke 5:8-9).

But God's response to us is one of grace, healing, and transfiguration:

⁶ Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.” (Isaiah 6:6)

¹⁰ Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.” (Luke 5:10)

Then we are made ready for the next thing God is doing in our lives. Then we can *see what He is doing*. All we have to do now is say, “Yes.”

⁸ *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8)*

¹¹ *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:11)*

If we wait for perfect purity, if we wait for some eschatological fulfillment before we can *see God*, then it may never happen. I want to see God now so that I might want Him even more, so that I can be made more pure both in singularity of purpose and in virtue so that I might see him more clearly, be better equipped that I may serve Him more perfectly, and that I might be more *like Him* so that the Father may someday say of me, "Well done good and faithful servant (Matt 25:23). I want to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith (Heb 12:2). All of us must want this; the Church must want this because it is only in *seeing* Him that She will become the Bride holy and without blemish (Eph 5:26-27).

And yet, I must confess that I have never *seen* God. Oh to be sure, I have known His presence in worship, in the Word, in Eucharist, in prayer, in my wife and children, family and friends, in His creation, and in the work He gave me to do. I am extraordinarily grateful for these Theophanies of His presence. And in the midst of these tremendous blessing, the Lord graciously granted me an unexpected vision some years back; not of Himself, but of His Bride. In a way it was like seeing God because the more like Him we become, the more we reflect His glory:

¹² *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. (1Cor 13:12)*

Even this mere reflection of God was a crystallizing experience for me. One of the labs I used to do with my students was to make crystals. I would make a supersaturated solution of Copper II Sulfate hexahydrate. Then they tie a string around a small seed crystal of the same chemical and carefully suspend it in the solution. Over time, the dissolved chemical would crystallize around the small seed crystal forming a large and beautiful crystal. This vision of the Bride of Christ was like that seed crystal. It took almost everything I knew from science, to scripture, theology, and philosophy, history, art, music, and poetry and crystallized them around itself to form the most beautiful thing I know. And if the Bride in her reflection of her Bridegroom, how much more beautiful must Jesus be.

Over the years I have often wondered, prayed, and sought God as to what I should do with this vision. I know that like Saint Paul I must be obedient as he was to the heavenly vision he experienced on the Road to Damascus (see Acts 9) as he explained to King Agrippa:

¹⁹ *"Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,"²⁰ but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance. (Act 26:19-20)*

I might not have *seen* God, but I have seen His Bride:

² *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2)*

And for Her, who is the Church, I can no longer be silent. "*Here am I! Send me.*"

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch.

² *The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give.*

³ *You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*

⁴ *You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her,*

and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.

⁵ *For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

⁶ *Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest,*

⁷ *and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth. (Isa 62:1-7)*

Jan's Reflection: *Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

The poor in spirit see the treasure hidden in the field and give everything to purchase it. They recognize Christ as their true treasure and He is enough. They lead a life of service; unattached to the world and its riches and empty promises. They know that it is God who has brought them into being. Their boast is in Him alone. According to Jesus to such persons belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The merchant who searches for the pearl of great price gives everything to acquire it. He is one who has been seeking and searching for the pearl of great price. The individual who relinquishes all of his desires and wants for Jesus has chosen the pearl of great price. Our Lord has made it possible for man to do this because of His sacrifice on Calvary.

Jesus, too, reminds me of the merchant in His search of the pearl. He is searching for His Bride, the Church, and has given His all for her. Our Creator loves us with a love that we cannot fully fathom. Lord Jesus, help me to lay aside my passions and wants so that I might inherit the Kingdom of Heaven where you reside with your Bride.

