

## The Beatitudes, the identity card of the disciple. A program for happiness

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time<sup>1</sup>

By Fr. Gonzalo Meza



Today in Matthew 5, Jesus is presenting our identity card as his disciples, the Beatitudes. Jesus, who is alive and present in his word and in the Most Holy Eucharist, is giving us a program of life to be happy, the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes are not just a set of good wishes. The Beatitudes are a self portrait of Jesus. That is how he was and lived. Jesus want us to live like him. Why? Because we the image of God. By baptism we were made children of God. We were redeemed by his Precious Blood! And as a result he has high expectations from us. He expect to make every effort to live like he did, following the Beatitudes. Our life should be a constant effort to imitate Jesus. They are the law of the redeemed, the law of the Children of God. The Beatitudes are the concrete and specific behavior that God expects from us. Is it impossible to do so? No, the saints imitated Jesus. Their life was an incarnation of the

Beatitudes. And we, as image of God, children of God, are called to live and make all efforts to live the Beatitudes.

Jesus tells us the rewards we will receive here on earth and in Heaven. On earth the practice of the Beatitudes make us partakers of the divine nature. Because when we practice them we receive abundant graces from God. The more we practice them, the stronger our communion with him. The practice of the Beatitudes make us share in the life of Jesus. The reward that we receive in heaven is the entrance in the Kingdom of God.

The Beatitudes are the first series of Jesus' teaching known as the Sermon of the Mountain. The Mountain in the Bible evokes the place of Divine Revelation. It was in Mount Sinai that God revealed his will to Moses and gave him the tablets of the Commandments. Jesus, true God and true man, by teaching in the mountain is transmitting and teaching his divine message to his disciples.

The main word to understand the Beatitudes is "blessed," which was translated from the Greek. The original word is "makarios" (μακάριος), which means happy. There are 9 beatitudes. Blessed/Happy are the poor in spirit. Blessed/Happy are those who mourn. Happy are the meek. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Happy are the merciful. Happy are the clean of heart. Happy are the peacemakers. Happy are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Happy are you when they insult you or persecute you because of me.

They are happy not because they were born poor, or because they always lament. No, they are happy because they freely and willingly embraced the state of poverty, meekness, humility, etc. They are happy because the promises, the rewards they are receiving on earth and in heaven.

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Let us take a look at three of them. Blessed/Happy are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. We sang this verse during today's psalm, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs." The biblical word used here is "ptochos" (πτωχοί). It refers not only to those without material possessions. It refers to those whose only possession is God. People whose confidence is in God only. In that sense it comprehends the indigents and the rich, every social rank. The poor in Spirit are those who know that their whole life does not depend on wealth but on God. The poor in spirit recognizes himself as a beggar of God's grace and of his mercy. As a beggar, he receives everything from him. His spirit is not set upon riches but on God. St Paul's told us today in the second reading: "Not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God".<sup>2</sup>

The third beatitude is related to the first one "Blessed/Happy are the meek, for they will inherit the land." Who are the meek? The Bible uses the Hebrew word "anawim", which is similar to the word used in the first beatitude, the poor. One saint of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, St Chromatius said about it, "The meek are those who are gentle, humble and unassuming, simple in faith and patient in the face of every affront. Imbued with the precepts of the gospel, they imitate the meekness of the Lord, who says, 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.'"<sup>3</sup> Who, then is the meek? The meek one is more content to endure an offense than to commit one. The meek is the one who has no place in his heart for resentment, aggression, jealousy, and pride.

The second beatitude is "blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted." The mourners are not only those who grief at a time of bereavement. They are those who repent for their offenses, and therefore try to make reparation as a form of their constant conversion to the Lord. They live a life of penance and sacrifice, like the saints. One spiritual author said: "Those who mourn are not [only and mainly] those bereaving the death of a spouse or the loss of loved ones. Rather, those blessed persons who ... do not cease to mourn over the iniquity of the world or the offenses of sinners with a pious, duty-bound sentiment." Talking about, poverty in the spirit, meekness and those who mourn living a life of conversion, the prophet Zephaniah said in the first reading: "Seek justice, seek humility; [The humble, the meek and the just] shall do no wrong and speak no lies; nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue." (Zep 2:3.3:13) Who will console those who mourn? God himself.

As Pope Francis has said many times, to be a Catholic is not only to attend Mass (sometimes willingly, other times unwillingly) and to contribute financially to the needs of the local church. Yes they are very important, but that is not the essence of being a disciple of Jesus. The main characteristic that define a person as Catholic is his constant practice or at least his effort to live up with the Beatitudes.

The Catechism of the Church teaches us that the beatitudes confront us with significant choices in life. They invite us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. They teach us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement—however beneficial it may be— such as science, technology, and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone."<sup>4</sup> The Beatitudes teach us that if we say we are Catholics we must turn down the proposals and values of the world, especially wealth and well-being at any cost.

Today we must ask ourselves, how have I practiced the beatitudes in the past and in my present life? Have I practiced (or make an effort to practice) the beatitudes or have I practiced the "values", of the world,

<sup>2</sup> *New American Bible*. (2011). (Revised Edition, 1 Co 1:26–30). Washington, DC: USCCB.

<sup>3</sup> Simonetti, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Matthew 1–13* (p. 82). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., p. 429). Washington, DC: USCCB

including the hidden idolatries of wealth, power, money and lust? Practicing the false “values” of the world does not make us Catholic. The identity of a Catholic is found in the Beatitudes. In there we find also a program for happiness in this world and in the world to come. St John Chrysostom said that the reward from God is much greater than that received from others for any human acts of goodness, “When you hear the voice of a beggar, remember that before God you yourself and I are beggars”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Simonetti, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Matthew 1–13* (p. 80). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.