

BEATITUDES

Jesus Christ gave us the Eight Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded for all posterity in the Gospel of Matthew, the first Book of the New Testament of the Bible.

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

Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

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

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

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

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

Gospel of St. Matthew 5:3-10

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

"Poor in spirit" means to be humble. Humility is the realization that all your gifts and blessings come from the grace of God. To have poverty of spirit means to be completely empty and open to the Word of God. When we are an empty cup and devoid of pride, we are humble. Humility brings openness and an inner peace, allowing one to do the will of God. He who humbles himself is able to accept our frail nature, to repent, and to allow the grace of God to lead us to conversion.

It is pride, the opposite of humility, that brings misery. For pride brings anger and the seeking of revenge, especially when one is offended. If every man were humble and poor in spirit, there would be no war!

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

If we are humble and appreciate that all of our gifts and blessings come from God, we grow in love and gratitude for Jesus Christ our Savior. But this can only produce mourning and regret over our own sins and the sins of this world, for we have hurt the one who has been so good to us. One also mourns for the suffering of others.

Mourning in this context is called a blessing, because mourning our fallen nature creates in us a desire to improve ourselves and to do what is right!

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

St. Gregory of Nyssa taught that the Beatitudes build one upon another. A humble person becomes meek, or becomes gentle and kind, and exhibits a docility of spirit, even in the face of adversity and hardship. A person that is meek is one that exhibits self-control. St. Augustine advises us to be meek in the face of the Lord, and not resist but be obedient to him. Obedience and submission to the will of God are certainly not in vogue these days, but they will bring one peace in this world and in the next.

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

Justice and righteousness in the New Covenant indicate the fulfillment of God's will in your heart and soul. It is not mere observance of the law (Matthew 5:20), but rather an expression of brotherly love (I John 3:10). A continuous desire for justice and moral perfection will lead one to a fulfillment of that desire - a transition and conversion to holiness. This is true for all the virtues - if you hunger and thirst for temperance, you will head towards the goal you have in mind. St. Augustine called the Beatitudes the ideal for every Christian life! In his discourse on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, he noted the correspondence of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and their necessity in fulfilling the Beatitudes.

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

Mercy is the loving disposition towards those who suffer distress. Love, compassion, and forgiveness towards one's neighbor will bring peace in your relationships. We say in the Lord's Prayer: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* As we are merciful to others, so our Heavenly Father will be merciful with us! Jesus reminds us that whatever "you did to the least of my brethren, you did it to me (Matthew 25:31-46)." St. Paul calls for the *obedience of faith* in the beginning and end of his Letter to the Romans (1:5, 16:25-27). The following are ways to be merciful to your neighbor as well as to be obedient in faith to Christ our Savior.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

- 1 Admonish sinners
- 2 Instruct the uninformed
- 3 Counsel the doubtful
- 4 Comfort the sorrowful
- 5 Be patient with those in error
- 6 Forgive offenses
- 7 Pray for the living and the dead

The Corporal Works of Mercy

- 1 Feed the Hungry
- 2 Give drink to the thirsty
- 3 Clothe the naked
- 4 Shelter the homeless
- 5 Comfort the imprisoned
- 6 Visit the sick
- 7 Bury the dead

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

Moses (Exodus 33:20), John 1:18, and Paul (I Timothy 6:16) all say that no one can see God here on earth! But Jesus says the pure of heart *shall* see God! To be pure of heart means to be free of all selfish intentions and self-seeking desires. What a beautiful goal! How many times have any of us performed an act perfectly free of any personal gain? Such an act is pure love. An act of pure and selfless giving brings happiness to all.

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

Jesus gives us peace - *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you"* (John 14:27). Peace is also a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Peacemakers not only live peaceful lives but also try to bring peace and friendship to others, and to preserve peace between God and man. But one cannot give another what one does not possess oneself. Praying for peace will help change your heart. The Lord wants you first to be filled with the blessings of peace and then to pass it on to those who have need of it. By imitating God's love of man, the peacemakers become children of God.

**"Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."**

The biblical passage continues to elaborate: *"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:11-12). Jesus said many times that those who follow Him will be persecuted. *"If they persecute me, they will persecute you"* (John 15:20-21).

Before his Conversion, Saul persecuted the early Church in Jerusalem, which scattered the Christians throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1).

St. Peter advised *"Whoever is made to suffer as a Christian should not be ashamed but glorify God because of the name"* (I Peter 4:16).

The Woman who brought forth the male child destined to rule all nations with an iron rod was persecuted in Revelation 12.

Nearly all of the Apostles, and many Christians in the Roman era suffered martyrdom. World Wars I and II, and the Middle East wars in Iraq, Egypt, and Syria have seen their share of martyrs. The Central American Martyrs include the 38 recognized martyrs of La Cristiada. The Cristero War from 1926 to 1929, when the Mexican government persecuted priests of the Catholic Church, such as St. Christopher Magallanes, St. Toribio Romo Gonzalez, and the 14 year old martyr Blessed Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio. Another Central American martyr was Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, who was assassinated while saying Mass on March 24, 1980 for speaking out against government human rights violations.

As in the time of the early Christian Church, a Christian in the Middle East today is still called a *Nazarene* or in Arabic *Nasrani*. On October 31, 2010, at least 58 Christians were slaughtered during Sunday Mass at Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Eastern Catholic Church in Baghdad. In July 2014 the terrorist Islamic State marked remaining Christian homes in Mosul with the Arabic letter Noon - for Nazarene - and advised residents that they have 24 hours to leave, convert to Islam, or die. Sixty thousand Christians in Mosul have been displaced from their homes, and over one million Christians have fled Iraq since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003. It is estimated that the present turmoil in Syria has resulted in over 700,000 Christian refugees escaping to Jordan, Lebanon, and other Middle Eastern countries.

**But the Lord promised those that suffer for his sake
That they will be rewarded with the Kingdom of Heaven!**