

4th Beatitude:

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

Μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

Brief Lesson in Greek Grammar

The Greek verbs for hunger (πείνω, *peinō*) and thirst (δείψω, *deipsō*) normally take their object in the genitive case, the case of possession. The genitive case implies hunger or thirst for *some* or *part* of the object desired (e.g., “I hunger for *some bread*.” “I thirst for *some water*.”). Had this Beatitude been rendered in normal Greek syntax, it would have read, “Blessed are those who hunger & thirst for *some righteousness* (τῆς δικαιοσύνης), but it does not say this. The object of hunger & thirst – righteousness – is rendered in the *accusative* case, which implies that the hunger and thirst is not partial, but for the *whole* of righteousness, *total* righteousness, *complete* righteousness.

Are we content with partial righteousness, with *some* righteousness?

Do we desire righteousness as much as a starving man wants food, or a man dying of thirst wants water?

How does righteousness differ from self-righteousness?

How does this distinction help us understand what righteousness really is?

What is the vice that stands opposite of hungering & thirsting for righteousness?

It is the most depressing thing in the world. It is hell on earth. It finds our very highest joy – God Himself – joyless. If Joy himself is joyless, where can we find joy? If the salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be restored? If the very light in us is darkness, how great is that darkness!

What is the vice that masquerades as hungering & thirsting for righteousness?

4th Beatitude: Citations from the Fathers & others



For the sign of Christianity is this, that one being pleasing to God so as to seek to hide oneself from the eyes of men. And even if a person should possess the complete treasures of the King, he should hide them and say continually: “The treasure is not mine, but another has given it to me as a charge. For I am a beggar and when it pleases him, he can claim it from me.” If anyone should say: “I am rich. I have enough. I possess goods. There is nothing more I need,” such a person is not a Christian, but a vessel of deceit and of the devil. For the enjoyment of God is insatiable and the more anyone tastes and eats, the more he hungers. Persons of this kind have an ardor and love toward God that nothing can restrain. [St. Macarius the Great, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies*, 15.37.]



After this the Lord goes on to say: “blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” It is nothing bodily, nothing earthly, that this hunger, this thirst seeks for: but it desires to be satiated with the good food of righteousness, and wants to be admitted to all the deepest mysteries, and be filled with the Lord Himself. Happy the mind that craves this food and is eager for such drink: which it certainly would not seek for if it had never tasted its sweetness. But hearing the Prophet’s spirit saying to him: “taste and see that the Lord is sweet;” it has received some portion of sweetness from on high, and blazed out in love of the purest pleasure, so that spurning all things temporal, it is seized with the utmost eagerness for eating and drinking righteousness, and grasps the truth of that first commandment which says: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength:” since to love God is nothing else but to love righteousness. [Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461), *Sermon 95.7*.]

You have to overcome avarice by embracing the law of righteousness, which consists in merciful compassion for one’s fellow beings. [St. Nikitas Stethatos (d. ca. 1092), *On the Practice of the Virtues*, 13.]

Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue [Dt 16.20]

Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak, “the Jew” of Pshishke (d. 1813) explained the verse, “Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue,” saying that “We ought to follow justice with justice and not with unrighteousness” [Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim* 2.36]

And [Abram] believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness [Gen 15.5]

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven [Mt 5.20]

If you can once get him to the point of thinking that “religion is all very well up to a point,” you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all – and more amusing. [C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 9, p. 43]

Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You, – man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that You “resist the proud,” – yet man, this part of Your creation desires to praise You. You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless til they find rest in You. [St. Augustine (d. 430), *Confessions* 1.1.]