

The Beatitudes:
Marks of the Kingdom



The world has many poor in spirit, but not in the right way;
and many who mourn, but over money matters and loss of children;
and many who are meek, but in the face of impure passions;
and many who hunger and thirst, but to rob another's goods and to profit unjustly.
And there are many who are merciful, but to the body and its comforts;
and clean of heart, but out of vanity;
and peacemakers, but who subject the soul to the flesh;
and many who suffer persecution, but because they are disorderly;
many who are reproached, but for shameful sins.
Instead, only those are blessed who do and suffer these things for Christ
and follow his example.

For what reason? "Because theirs is the kingdom of heaven,"
and "they shall see God," and so forth.
So that it is not because they do and suffer these things that they are blessed
(since those just mentioned do the same),
but because they do and suffer them for Christ and following his example.
-St. Maximus the Confessor, Centuries on Charity 3.47

Introduction to the Beatitudes

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: (Mt 5.1-2)

How does St. Matthew emphasize the importance of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Compare Ps 78.3-4: I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders which he has wrought.

And Prv 31.8-9 RSV Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all who are left desolate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor and needy.

- 4.

A key to understanding: the word "blessed."

What language did Jesus speak? _____.

A common Hebrew & Aramaic idiom was *asherej*, which means "_____ _____ _____ _____..."

Compare Ps 1.1 "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked"

"The blessedness which belongs to the Christian is not a blessedness which is postponed to some future world of glory; it is a blessedness which exists _____ and _____. It is not something into which the Christian _____; it is something into which he _____."

[William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 84]

So, the Beatitudes describe _____ . They are the _____ of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Does that have any implications for us?



Blessedness is the totality and plenitude of everything that is good and that is desired as good, without a single deficiency, deprivation or impediment. The followers of Christ not only await blessedness, as something belonging to the future, but it is characteristic of their soul, as something present, insofar as Christ Himself is present in them. [St Gregory of Nyssa]

1st Beatitude:

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

Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Who are “the poor” that are referred to in this beatitude?

The Greek word.

Greek had 2 words for “poor,” *penēs* (πενήης) and *ptōchoi* (πτῶχοι). But *penēs* is not the Greek word used in this beatitude. The word used is *ptōchos*. *Penēs* describes the man who has nothing _____; *ptōchos* describes the man who has nothing _____.

The Aramaic/Hebrew word.

The Jews had a particular use for the word *poor*. In Aramaic & Hebrew, the word is *ani* or *ebion*. (“The poor” are the *anawim*.) These words in Hebrew underwent a four-stage development of meaning.

1. They began by meaning simply *poor*.
2. They went on to mean, *because poor, therefore having no influence or power, or help, or prestige*.
3. They went on to mean, *because having no influence, therefore down-trodden and oppressed by men*.
4. Finally, they came to describe the man who, *because he has no earthly resources whatever, puts his whole trust in God*.

So in Hebrew the word *poor* was used to describe the humble and helpless man who put his whole trust in God.

Compare Ps 34.6 that we sing near the end of Liturgy: “This *poor one* cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his tribulations.”

So who are the poor in this Beatitude? Those who have realized their own _____

_____ and who have put their whole _____.

Remember we are not talking about _____ poverty, but those who are poor _____

_____.

But how can we be poor in spirit?

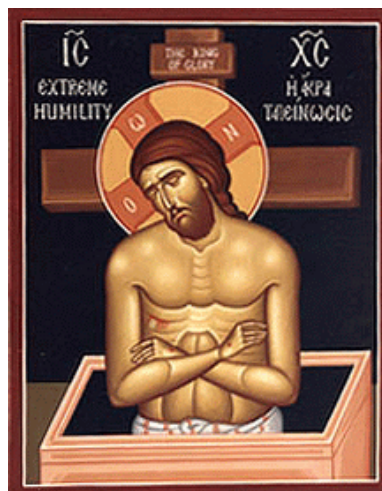
Those who have realized their own utter helplessness and who have put their whole trust in God are, in a word, _____. And so, _____ is another way of describing poverty of spirit.

Humility is thinking less _____ yourself, not thinking less _____ yourself. It does not mean you think about yourself in a _____; rather it means you don't think about yourself _____.

The Theotokos herself speaks of humility in her hymn (the Magnificat) when she says, "He 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 exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. [Luke 1.51-53]

What is the opposite of humility?

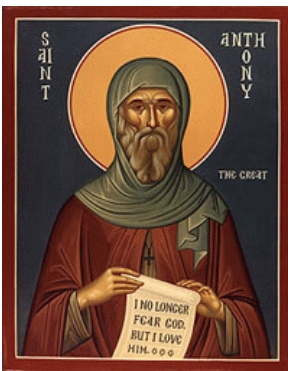
And whom does it characterize?



1st Beatitude: Citations from the Fathers & others

Abba Longinus was once asked what virtue he considered the most important of all. The wise elder replied: “Just as pride is the greatest of all evils, since it succeeded in casting down the angels from Heaven to the abyss, so humility is the greatest of all virtues. It has the power to raise the sinner from the abyss up the Heaven. For this reason, the Lord blesses, before all others, the poor of spirit.”

“Just as the ground on which we walk has no fear of falling,” a certain elder said, “so is the humble man.”



“I once saw all of the snares of the devil spread across the earth,” St Anthony the Great said, “and I became frightened. Who could possibly escape them?” he wondered, sighing. Then he heard a mysterious voice answering him: “He who is humble.”

St. Theodora had the custom of telling her disciples very frequently that neither great asceticism, nor extreme toil, nor any other hardships whatever can save the soul of man so much as humility of heart. And she would relate the following anecdote:

A certain hermit had the gift from God to expel evil spirits. Once he asked to learn what they feared most and what would force them to flee.

“Maybe fasting?” he asked one of them.

“We,” answered the spirit, “neither eat nor drink.”

“Vigils, then?”

“We do not sleep at all.”

“Fleeing the world?”

The demon laughed contemptuously: “Supposedly an important thing. But we spend the greater part of our time going around the deserts.”

“I abjure you to confess what it is that can subdue you,” the elder insisted.

The evil spirit, compelled by an other-worldly power, was forced to answer: “Humility, which we can never overcome.”

Before all other virtues, the man of God must attain humility. This the Divine Teacher pointed out to us first. “Blessed are the poor of spirit,” He told us, “for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” And who are called the poor in spirit? Surely they are the humble. [Abba John the Thebite]

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people except Christians ever imagine that they are guilty of themselves. ...There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault of which

we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. [C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), 94]



The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. [Psalm 51.17]



Though fasting, prayer, almsgiving, temperance, any other good thing whatever, be gathered together in you, without humility all fall away and perish. [St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew 15* (NPNF 10.92b)]

The more you have, the more you are occupied, the less you give. But the less you have the more free you are. Poverty for us is a freedom. It is not a mortification, a penance. It is joyful freedom. There is no television here, no this, no that. But we are perfectly happy. [Mother Teresa of Calcutta]

Where there is humility, consciousness of one's neediness, one's poverty, wretchedness, there God is, there the cleansing of sins is, there peace, light, freedom, contentment and blessedness are. To such poor in spirit the Lord came to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God, as is said: "he hath sent me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18), to the poor in spirit, but not to the rich; for their pride alienates them from the grace of God ...If people readily extend the hand of help and compassion to those who are truly poor and in extreme need of the very necessities of life, is not God even more compassionate regarding spiritual poverty, does he not paternally condescend to it at its call and fill it with His spiritual treasures? It is said: "He hath filled the hungry with good things" (Lk 1:53). [St John of Kronstadt]