

POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Library of the Apostolic Palace  
Wednesday, 29 April 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

With today's audience, we conclude our journey into the evangelical Beatitudes. As we have heard, the last one proclaims the eschatological joy of those persecuted for righteousness' sake. This Beatitude announces the same happiness as the first one: the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the persecuted as it does to the poor in spirit. We thus understand that we have reached the end of our joint journey revealed in the previous proclamations.

The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who thirst for holiness, mercy, the pure in heart and peacemakers may lead to persecution because of Christ. However, ultimately this persecution is a cause of joy and of great reward in heaven. The way of the Beatitudes is an Easter path that leads us from a life in accord with the world to one of God, from a life led by the flesh — that is by selfishness — to one guided by the Spirit.

With its idols, its compromises and its priorities, the world cannot accept this kind of life. The “structures of sin”[1] that are often produced by the human mind, and are extraneous to the Spirit of truth that the world cannot receive, (cf. Jn 14:17), cannot but reject poverty or meekness or purity and declare life according to the Gospel as a mistake and a problem; thus as something to isolate. This is what the world thinks: “These [people] are idealists or fanatics...”. This is how they think.

If the world lives as a function of money, then anyone who demonstrates that life can be lived in [self] giving and sacrifice becomes a nuisance to the system of greed. This word “nuisance” is key because Christian witness, which is so good for many people who follow it, bothers those who have a worldly mindset. They see it as chastising. When holiness appears and the life of the children of God emerges, there is something uncomfortable in that beauty that demands taking a stance: either to allow oneself to be questioned and to open oneself to the good or reject that light and harden one's heart, even until oppression and fury (cf. Wis 2:14-15). It is interesting and striking to note how hostility grows to fury in the persecution of martyrs. Just look at the persecutions of the last century, of the European dictatorships: how does one get to rage against Christians, against Christian witness and against the heroism of Christians?

But this demonstrates that the tragedy of persecution is also the place of liberation from subjection to the success, vainglory and compromise of the world. What makes those who are rejected by the world because of Christ rejoice? They rejoice at having found something that has more value than the entire world. Indeed: “For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mk 8:36). What is the advantage there?

It is painful to recall that in this very moment, there are many Christians in various parts of the world who are suffering from persecution, and we must hope and pray that their trials will soon end. They are many: today's martyrs outnumber the martyrs of the first centuries. Let us express our closeness to these brothers and sisters. We are a single body and these Christians are the bleeding limbs of the body of Christ who is the Church.

But we also have to be careful not to read this Beatitude from a self commiserating, victimized

perspective. In fact, mankind's contempt is not always synonymous with persecution: indeed shortly later, Jesus tells Christians that they are the "salt of the earth" and warns against the danger of "losing their taste" because in that case, salt "is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men" (Mt 5:13). Thus, when we lose the taste of Christ and the Gospel, there is also contempt which is our fault.

We have to be faithful to the humble way of the Beatitudes because it leads us to be of Christ and not of the world. It is worth remembering the journey of Saint Paul. When he thought he was a righteous person, he was in fact a persecutor, but when he found out he was a persecutor, he became a man of love who rejoiced in the suffering of the persecution inflicted on him (cf. Col 1:24).

If God grants us the grace to be more like the Crucified Christ and joined to his Passion, then exclusion and persecution are the manifestation of new life. This life is the same as the life of Christ who was "despised and rejected" for us men and women and for our salvation" (cf. Is 53:3; Acts 8:30-35). Welcoming his Spirit can lead us to have so much love in our heart as to offer our life for the world without making compromises with its deceit and accepting its rejection.

Compromises with the world are dangerous: Christians are always tempted to make compromises with the world, with the spirit of the world. This — rejecting compromises and journeying on the way of Jesus Christ — is the life of the Kingdom of Heaven, the greatest joy and true happiness. And, in persecutions there is always the presence of Jesus who accompanies us, the presence of Jesus who comforts us and the strength of the Holy Spirit that helps us to go forward. Let us not be discouraged when a life that is faithful to the Gospel draws persecution from people. There is the Holy Spirit who sustains us in this journey.

[1] Cf. Discourse to participants in a workshop entitled: "New forms of solidarity: Towards fraternal Inclusion, Integration and Innovation", 5 February 2020: "idolatry of money, greed and corruption are all 'structures of sin' — as John Paul II called them — produced by the 'globalization of indifference'".

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Library of the Apostolic Palace  
Wednesday, 15 April 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

Today's catechesis is dedicated to the seventh Beatitude, the one on the "peacemakers" who are proclaimed children of God. I am pleased that it falls immediately after Easter because Christ's peace is the fruit of his death and resurrection as we heard in the Reading of Saint Paul. In order to understand this Beatitude, we have to explain the meaning of the word "peace" which can be misinterpreted, or at times trivialized.

We must look at two ideas of peace: the first is the Biblical one, in which the beautiful word shalom appears, which expresses abundance, flourishing, wellbeing. In Hebrew, when one says shalom, one is wishing a beautiful, fulfilled and prosperous life, but also in terms of truth and justice that will find fulfillment in the Messiah, the Prince of Peace (cf. Is 9:6; Mic 5:4-5).

There is also another more widespread meaning in which the word “peace” is understood as a sort of interior serenity; I am calm, I am at peace. This is a modern, psychological and more subjective idea. We generally think that peace is stillness, harmony, inner balance. This accepted meaning of the word “peace” is incomplete and cannot be made absolute because anxiety can be an important time of growth.

The Lord himself often sows anxiety in us so that we may go towards him, to find him. In this sense, it is an important moment of growth. Meanwhile, it can happen that inner tranquility corresponds to a trained conscience and not to true spiritual redemption. The Lord often has to be “a sign of contradiction (cf. Lk 2:34-35), shaking our false securities in order to bring us to salvation. And in that moment, it seems we have no peace but it is the Lord who puts us on this path so that we may attain the peace that he himself will give to us.

At this point we have to remember that when the Lord says: “Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn 14:27), he means his peace which is different from the human kind, the one of the world. Jesus’ peace is different from the worldly one.

Let us ask ourselves: how does the world give peace? If we think of armed conflicts, wars normally end in two ways: either with the defeat of one of the two sides, or with a peace treaty. We cannot but hope and pray that this second path will always be taken. However, we have to consider that history is an infinite series of peace treaties contradicted by successive wars or by the metamorphosis of these same wars into other ways or into other places.

In our time too, war is being fought “piecemeal” in various scenarios and with different methods (cf. Homily at the Military Memorial in Redipuglia, 13 September 2014; Homily in Sarajevo, 6 June 2015; Address to the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, 21 February 2020). We have to at least suspect that within the framework of a globalization that is carried out above all for economic or financial interests, the “peace” of some corresponds to the “war” of others. And this is not Christ’s peace.

Instead, how does the Lord Jesus “give” his peace? We have heard Saint Paul say that Christ’s peace is “making one out of two” (cf. Eph 2:14), erasing hostility and reconciling. And the path to carry out this work of peace is his body. Indeed he reconciles all things and bestows peace with the blood of his cross as the same Apostle says elsewhere (cf. Col 1:20).

And here, I ask myself, we can all ask ourselves: who then are the “peacemakers?”. The seventh Beatitude is the most active one, explicitly operative; the verbal expression is similar to the one used in the first verse of the Bible for the Creation, and it indicates initiative and industriousness. Love by its nature is creative — love is always creative — and seeks reconciliation at any cost.

Those who have learned the art of peace and exercise it are called the children of God. They know that there can be no reconciliation without giving one’s own life and that peace should always be sought everywhere. Always and everywhere: Do not forget this! It should be sought this way. It is not an autonomous work that is the fruit of one’s own abilities. It is the manifestation of the grace received from Christ who is our peace and who has made us Children of God.

May the true shalom and the true interior balance spring forth from Christ’s peace which comes from the Cross and generates a new humanity, embodied by an infinite multitude of inventive, creative Saints who have designed ever new paths to love; Saints who build peace. This life, as children of God who for Christ’s blood, seek and find their brothers and sisters, is true happiness. Blessed are those who follow this path. And once again, I wish you all a Happy Easter, in the peace of Christ.

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Library of the Apostolic Palace  
Wednesday, 1st April 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

Today, let us read together the sixth Beatitude which promises the vision of God and has purity of heart as a condition.

There is a Psalm that reads: “my heart says to thee, ‘Thy face, Lord, do I seek.’ Hide not thy face from me” (Ps 27[28]:8-9).

This language manifests the thirst for a personal relationship with God, not a mechanical one, not a somewhat vague one, no: personal, which the Book of Job also expresses as a sign of a sincere relationship. The Book of Job reads: “I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see thee” (42:5). And often I think that this is the journey of life, in our relationship with God. We know God from hearsay, but with our experience, we go forward, forward, forward, and in the end, we come to know him directly, if we are faithful ... And this is the maturity of the Spirit.

How do we reach this intimacy, to know God with our eyes? We can think of the disciples at Emmaus, for example, who have the Lord beside them but “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Lk 24:16). The Lord will open their eyes at the end of a journey that culminates with the breaking of bread and had begun with a scolding: “O Foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Lk 24:25). This is the reprimand at the beginning. It is the root of their blindness: their hearts were foolish and slow. And when the heart is foolish and slow, things cannot be seen. Things appear foggy. Herein lies the wisdom of this Beatitude: in order to contemplate it, we need to enter within ourselves and make room for God because, as Saint Augustine says, God is “more inward than my innermost self” (“interior intimo meo” Confessions iii, 6, 11). In order to see God, there is neither the need to change eyeglasses or vantage point, nor to change the theological authors who teach the path: we need to free the heart from its deception. This is the only path.

This is a decisive maturity: when we realize that our worst enemy is often hidden within our heart. The most noble battle is the one against the inner deception that creates our sins. Because sins change our inner vision, they change our evaluation of things. They make us see things that are not real or at least not that real.

It is thus important to understand what purity of heart is. In order to do so, we should remember that, for the Bible, the heart does not consist only in feelings, but rather it is a human being’s most intimate place, the inner space where people are themselves. This is according to the Bible.

The Gospel of Matthew itself says “if our eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Matt 6:23). This light is the gaze of the heart, the perspective, synthesis and the point from which reality can be seen (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 143).

But what does having a “pure” heart mean? A pure heart lives in the presence of the Lord, preserving in the heart what is worthy of the relationship with him. Only in this way can one possess an intimate life that is “unified, linear and unwinding.

A purified heart is, therefore, the result of a process that implies liberation and renunciation. Those who are pure of heart are not born that way but rather they have experienced an inner simplification, learning to renounce the evil within oneself, which the Bible calls circumcision of the heart (cf. Dt 10:16; 30:6, Ex 44:9; Jer 4:4).

This inner purification implies recognition of the part of the heart that is under the influence of evil — “You know Father, I feel this way, I think this way, I see this way and this is bad”: recognizing the bad part, the part that is clouded by evil — in order to learn the art of always allowing ourselves to be trained and guided by the Holy Spirit. The journey from a sick heart, from a sinful heart, from a heart that cannot see things well because it is in sin, to the fullness of the light of the heart, is the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who guides us to take this journey. Through this journey of the heart, we can achieve “seeing God”.

In this beatific vision, there is an eschatological dimension of the future, as with all Beatitudes: it is the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven towards which we are directed. But there is also the other dimension: to see God means understanding the design of Providence in what happens to us, to recognize his presence in the Sacraments, his presence in our brothers and sisters, especially the poor and the suffering, and to recognize God there where he manifests himself (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2519).

This Beatitude is somewhat the fruit of the preceding ones: if we have listened to the thirst for good that dwells within us and we are aware of living of mercy, a journey of freedom begins which lasts an entire lifetime and leads us to Heaven. It is serious work, work that is carried out by the Holy Spirit if we give him the room to do it, if we are open to the action of the Holy Spirit. This is why we can say that it is mostly the work of God in us — in the trials and the purifications of life — and this is the work of God and of the Holy Spirit who brings great joy, true and profound peace. Let us not be afraid, let us open the doors of our heart to the Holy Spirit so that he may purify us and lead us forward in this journey towards full joy.

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace  
Wednesday, 18 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

Today we will consider the fifth Beatitude which says: “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7). There is a peculiar aspect to this beatitude. It is the only one in which the cause and the fruit of happiness coincide: mercy. Those who show mercy will find mercy, they will be “shown mercy”.

This theme of reciprocity of forgiveness is not found only in this Beatitude, but is recurrent throughout the Gospel. How could it be otherwise? Mercy is the very heart of God! Jesus says: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven” (Lk 6:37). It is always the same reciprocity. And the Letter of James states that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jam 2:13).

But it is above all in the “Lord's Prayer” that we pray: “forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12); and this question is taken up again at the end: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses,

neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Mt 6:14-15; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2838).

There are two things that cannot be separated: forgiveness granted and forgiveness received. However, many people struggle; they cannot forgive. Often the harm received is so great that being able to forgive feels like climbing a very high mountain: an enormous effort; and one thinks: it cannot be done, this cannot be done. This fact of the reciprocity of mercy shows that we have to overturn the perspective. We cannot do this alone. We need God's grace, we must ask for it. Indeed if the fifth Beatitude promises mercy, and in the "Lord's Prayer" we ask for the forgiveness of debts, it means that we are essentially debtors and we need to find mercy!

We are all debtors. All of us. To God who is so generous and to our brothers and sisters. Everyone knows that he/she is not the father or mother that he or she should be, the bride or groom, the brother or sister. We are all "in deficit" in life. And we need mercy. We know that we too have done wrong. There is always something lacking in the good that we should have done.

However, our very poverty becomes our strength to forgive! We are debtors and if, as we heard at the start, we shall be measured with the same measure with which we measure others (cf. Lk 6:38), then it would suit us to widen our measure and to forgive debts; to forgive. Each person should remember that they need to forgive, they are in need of forgiveness and they need patience. This is the secret to mercy: by forgiving one is forgiven. Thus God precedes us and he forgives us first (cf. Rom 5:8). In receiving his forgiveness, we too are capable of forgiving. One's own misery and lack of justice therefore, become opportunities to open oneself up to the Kingdom of Heaven, to a greater measure, the measure of God who is mercy.

Where does our mercy come from? Jesus told us: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The more one welcomes the Father's love, the more we can love (cf. CCC 2842). Mercy is not a dimension among others but rather the centre of Christian life. There is no Christianity without mercy [Cf. Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Dives in Misericordia (30 November 1980); Misericordiae Vultus Bull (11 April 2015); Apostolic Letter Misericordia et misera (20 November 2016)]. If all our Christianity does not lead us to mercy, then we have taken the wrong path because mercy is the only true destination of all spiritual journeys. It is one of the most beautiful fruits of mercy (cf. CCC 1829).

I remember that this theme was chosen for the first Angelus that I had to recite as Pope: mercy. And this has remained very much impressed on me, as a message that I would always have to offer as Pope, a message for everyday: mercy. I remember that on that day I even had an attitude that was somewhat "brazen", as if I were advertising a book about mercy that had just been published by Cardinal Kasper. And on that day I felt very strongly that this is the message that I must offer as Bishop of Rome: mercy, mercy, please, forgiveness.

God's mercy is our liberation and our happiness. We live of mercy and we cannot afford to be without mercy. It is the air that we breathe. We are too poor to set any conditions. We need to forgive because we need to be forgiven. Thank you!

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Library of the Apostolic Palace  
Wednesday, 11 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

At today's audience, we shall continue to meditate on the luminous path of happiness that the Lord consigned to us in the Beatitudes. We have come to the fourth one: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Mt 5:6).

We have already encountered poverty in spirit and weeping. Now we face another type of weakness, one that is linked to hunger and thirst. Hunger and thirst are primary needs. They have to do with survival. This should be underscored: this does not concern a general desire, but rather a vital, daily need such as nourishment.

But what does hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake mean? We are certainly not talking about those who want vengeance. Indeed in the preceding Beatitude, we spoke about meekness. Admittedly, injustice wounds humanity. Human society urgently needs fairness, truth and social justice. Let us remember that the evil suffered by women and men throughout the world reaches the heart of God the Father. What Father would not suffer over the suffering of his children?

The Scriptures speak of the suffering of the poor and oppressed which God knows and shares. For having listened to the cry of oppression raised by children of Israel — as the Book of Exodus narrates (cf. Ex 3:7-10) — God descended to free his people. But the hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake that the Lord refers to is even more profound than the legitimate need for human justice that each man and woman carries in his/her heart.

In the "Sermon on the Mount" which takes place a little later, Jesus speaks of righteousness that is greater than human rights or personal perfection, saying, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). This is the righteousness that comes from God (cf. 1 Cor 1:30).

In the Scriptures, a thirst is expressed that is more profound than a physical one, a desire at the root of our being. One psalm says: "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee; my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is (Ps 63[62]:1). The Fathers of the Church speak about this anxiety that lives in the heart of mankind. Saint Augustine says: "Thou madest us for Thyself, Lord, and our heart is restless, until it rests in Thee".[1] There is an interior thirst, an inner hunger, an anxiety....

In each heart, even in that of the most corrupt and distant people, there is a hidden yearning for the light, even if it is buried under the rubble of deceit and mistakes, but there is always the thirst for truth and good which is the thirst for God. The Holy Spirit arouses this thirst. He is the living water that has shaped our dust; he is the creative breath that gave it life.

This is why the Church is sent forth to proclaim to all the Word of God, imbued with the Holy Spirit. Because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest righteousness that can be offered to the heart of humanity which has a vital need for it, even though it does not realize this. [2]

For example, when a man and woman marry, they have the intention of doing something great and beautiful, and if they keep this thirst alive, they will always find the way to move forward in the midst of difficulties with the help of Grace. Young people too have this hunger and they must not lose it! We have to protect and nourish in children's hearts, the desire for love, tenderness and welcoming that they express in their sincere and luminous outbursts.

Each person is called to rediscover what truly matters, what they truly need, what makes life good, and

at the same time, what is secondary and what one can easily do without.

In this Beatitude, Jesus announces — hunger and thirst for righteousness — which is a thirst that will not be disappointed; a thirst that, if supported, will be satisfied and always have a positive outcome because it corresponds with God’s own heart, with his Holy Spirit that is love, and also with the seed that the Holy Spirit sowed within our hearts. May the Lord grant us this grace: to have this thirst for righteousness which is the very desire to find him, to see God and to do good unto others.

At this time, I would like to address all the sick who have contracted the virus and the many who suffer from the uncertainty of their respective illnesses. I offer a heartfelt thanks to the hospital staff, the physicians, male and female nurses and volunteers who are close to the people who are suffering at this very difficult time. I thank all Christians, all the men and women of good will who pray at this moment, in unison, whichever religious tradition they belong to. I warmly thank you for this effort. However, I would not want this suffering, this epidemic that is so strong, to cause us to forget the poor Syrians who are suffering on the border between Greece and Turkey: a people who have been suffering for years. They have to flee war, hunger and illness. Let us not forget our brothers and sisters and the many children who are suffering there.

I also warmly thank the “Due Palazzi” Parish for the text of the Via Crucis for Good Friday, which I received yesterday. Thank you all for your deep meditation.

[1] Confessions, n. 1,1.5.

[2] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2017: “The grace of the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God. Uniting us by faith and Baptism to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the Spirit makes us sharers in his life”.

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DESERT  
POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 26 February 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

Today, Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten journey, a 40-day journey towards Easter, towards the heart of the liturgical year and of faith. It is a journey that follows the one of Jesus, who at the start of his ministry, withdrew to the desert for 40 days to pray and fast, and was tempted by the devil. Today, I would like to speak precisely about the spiritual significance of the desert. What does the desert mean spiritually for all of us, also for those of us who live in cities? What does the desert mean?

Let us imagine that we are in a desert. The first feeling would be that of being enveloped by a great silence: no sound besides the wind and our own breathing. The desert is a place of detachment from the din that surrounds us. It is the absence of words to make room for another Word, the Word of God, that caresses our hearts like a light breeze (cf. 1 Kings 19:12). The desert is the place of the Word with a capital W. Indeed in the Bible, the Lord loves to speak to us in the desert. It is in the desert that he gave



Moses the “ten words”, the Ten Commandments. And when the people distance themselves from him, becoming like an unfaithful wife, God says: “So I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart.... She shall respond there as in the days of her youth” (Hos 2:16-17). The Word of God is heard in the desert. It is like a soft sound. The Book of Kings says that the Word of God is like a sonorous thread of silence. In the desert one finds a renewed intimacy with God, the Lord’s love. Jesus loved to withdraw daily to deserted places and pray (cf. Lk 5:16). He taught us how to seek the Father who speaks to us in silence. And it is not easy to be silent in the heart because we always try to talk a little, to be with others.

Lent is a favourable time to make room for the Word of God. It is the time to switch off the television and open the Bible. It is the time to separate from mobile phones and connect to the Gospel. When I was a child there was no television but there was the habit of not listening to the radio. Lent is a desert. It is a time to give up something, to distance ourselves from mobiles and connect to the Gospel. It is the time to give up useless words, gossip and slander and to talk to and be informal with the Lord. It is the time to dedicate ourselves to a healthy ecology of the heart, to cleanse it. We live in an environment that is polluted by too much verbal violence, by many offensive and noxious words that the internet amplifies. Nowadays, we insult each other as if we were saying “Good Morning”. We are submerged by the empty words of advertising, of underhanded messages. We have become accustomed to hearing everything about everyone and we run the risk of slipping into a worldliness that sullies the heart and there is no bypass to heal this. Only silence. We struggle to distinguish the voice of the Lord speaking to us, the voice of conscience, the voice of goodness. By calling us to the desert, Jesus invites us to listen to what matters, to what is important, to the essential. Replying to the devil who tempted him [Jesus] said: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). We need the Word of God like bread, [even] more than bread. We need it to speak with God: we need to pray. Because only before God do the inclinations of the heart come to light and the duplicity of the spirit cease. The desert is a place of life not of death because speaking to the Lord in silence, gives us life again.

Let us try to think of a desert again. The desert is the place of the essential. Let us look at our lives: how many useless things surround us! We chase after thousands of things that seem necessary and that in reality are not. How good it would be for us to free ourselves from many superfluous realities, to rediscover what matters, to rediscover the faces of those who are beside us! Jesus also sets us an example of this: fasting. Fasting is knowing how to give up things that are vain and superfluous in order to reach the essential. Fasting is not only for losing weight. Fasting is actually going to the essential. It is seeking the beauty of a simpler life.

Lastly, the desert is a place of solitude. Today too, there are many deserts near us. They are the lonely and neglected people. How many poor and elderly people are near us and live in silence, without making any noise, marginalized and discarded!. Speaking about them does not increase the ratings. But the desert leads us to them, to those who were stifled and who silently ask for our help: many silent gazes that ask for our help. The journey in the Lenten desert is a journey of charity towards the weakest.

Prayer, fasting, works of mercy. This is the path of the Lenten desert.

Dear brothers and sisters, God made his promise through the voice of the Prophet Isaiah: “Behold I am doing a new thing; ... I will make a way in the wilderness” (Is 43:19). A new path opens up in the desert, which takes us from death to life. We enter the desert with Jesus and we will leave it experiencing Easter, the power of God’s love which renews life. It will happen to us just as it does to deserts that blossom in spring, suddenly sprouting buds and plants “out of nothing”. Take courage, let us enter this

Lenten desert. Let us follow Jesus in the desert: with him, our deserts will blossom.

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 19 February 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

In today's catechesis we consider the third of the eight Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5).

Here, the term "meek", literally means sweet, docile, gentle, devoid of violence. Meekness manifests itself in times of conflict. It can be seen by how one reacts to a hostile situation. Anyone can appear meek when everything is peaceful, but how does one react "under pressure", if one is under attack, offended, threatened?

In one passage, Saint Paul refers to "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor 10:1). Meanwhile, Saint Peter recalls the attitude of Jesus during his Passion: he did not respond nor threaten because "he trusted to him who judges justly" (1 Pt 2:23). And the meekness of Jesus can be clearly seen in his Passion.

In Scripture, the word "meek" also indicates one who does not have earthly property. Thus, we are struck by the fact that the third Beatitude says precisely that the meek "shall inherit the earth".

In reality, this Beatitude quotes Psalm 37 which we heard at the beginning of the catechesis. There too, meekness and earthly possessions are juxtaposed. If one thinks about it, these two things appear to be incompatible. Indeed the possession of land is a typical setting for conflict: people often fight over a territory in order to dominate a particular area. The stronger one prevails in war and conquers other lands.

But let us look more closely at the verb that is used to indicate the possessions of the meek: they do not conquer the earth. It does not say "Blessed the meek for they shall conquer the earth". They "inherit it". Blessed are the meek, for they shall "inherit" the earth. In the Scriptures the verb "inherit" has a much deeper meaning. The People of God actually refer to the land of Israel which is the Land of the Promise, as their "inheritance".

That land is a promise and a gift to the People of God and it becomes the symbol for something much greater than a simple territory. There is a "land" — allow me to play on words — which is Heaven, that is the land towards which we are journeying: the new heavens and the new earth towards which we are going (cf. Is 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pt 3:13; Ap 21:1).

Therefore the meek are those who "inherit" the most sublime of territories. They are not cowards, "weak" people who find a moral expedient to avoid difficulties. Quite the contrary! They are people who have received an inheritance and do not wish to squander it. The meek are not accommodating, but rather they are Christ's disciples who have learned how to protect quite another earth. They protect their peace. They protect their relationship with God and they protect his gifts, God's gifts, preserving mercy, fraternity, trust, hope, because meek people are merciful, fraternal, trusting people with hope.

Here we have to mention the sin of “anger”, a violent surge whose impulse we all understand. Who has not been angry at some point? Everyone [has]. We have to reconsider this Beatitude and ask ourselves a question: how many things have we destroyed in anger? How many things have we lost? A moment of anger can destroy many things. One loses control and does not value what is truly important. And one can ruin a relationship with a brother or sister, sometimes beyond any remedy. Many brothers or sisters no longer speak to each other because of anger. They distance themselves from each other. It is the opposite of meekness. Meekness brings people together. Anger separates.

Meekness can conquer many things. Meekness is capable of winning over hearts, saving friendships and many other things besides. People become angry, but then they calm down, they think it over and retrace their steps. In this way, one can rebuild with meekness.

“The “earth” to be conquered with meekness is the salvation of that brother whom the Gospel of Matthew mentions: “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (Mt 18:15). There is no earth more beautiful than the heart of others. There is no finer territory to attain than that of the peace found again with a brother or sister. And this is the earth to be inherited through meekness!

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 12 February 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

We have started the journey of the Beatitudes and today, we will pause on the second one: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

In the Greek in which the Gospel was written, this beatitude is expressed with a verb that is not in the passive form — in fact the Blessed do not endure this mourning — but in the active form: “they afflict themselves”: they cry but from within. It has to do with a teaching that has become central to Christian spirituality and which the Desert Fathers, namely the first monks in history, referred to as “penthos”, that is, an inner suffering that opens out to a relationship with the Lord and our neighbour; to a renewed relationship with the Lord and neighbour.

In the Scriptures, this weeping, can have two aspects: the first is for the death or suffering of someone. The other aspect is the tears for the sin — for one’s own sin —, when the heart bleeds for the suffering of having offended God and neighbour.

It is therefore a case of loving the other in such a way as to be bonded to him/her to the point of sharing their suffering. There are many people who remain distant, one step behind. It is important instead that others enter our heart.

I have often spoken about the gift of tears and of how precious this is. Can one love in a cold way? Can one love as a function, out of duty? Certainly not. There are some afflicted people who need comforting but sometimes there are also some comforted ones who need to be afflicted, reawakened, who have a heart of stone and have forgotten how to cry. There is also the need to reawaken those who do not know how to be moved by the suffering of others.

Grief, for example, is a bitter path but it can serve to open our eyes to life and the sacred and irreplaceable value of each person, and at that moment, one realizes how short time is.

There is a second meaning to this paradoxical Beatitude: crying for the sin.

Here we have to distinguish: there are those who become angry because they made a mistake. But this is pride. Instead, there are those who cry for the wrong done, for the good omitted, for the betrayal of the relationship with God. This is crying for not having loved, that springs from caring about the life of others. Here one cries because one does not match the Lord who loves us so much, and the thought of the good not done makes one sad. This is the sense of the sin. These people say: "I have hurt the one I love" and this causes them to suffer to the point of tears. May God be blessed if these tears arrive!

This is the issue of one's errors that need to be faced, difficult but vital. Let us think about the weeping of Saint Peter which takes him to a new and much truer love. It is weeping that purifies, renews. Peter looked at Jesus and cried: his heart had been renewed. Unlike Judas who would not accept that he had made a mistake and, poor wretch, killed himself. To understand sin is a gift from God, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot understand sin on our own. It is a grace that we have to ask. Lord may I understand the evil I have committed or might commit. This is a great gift and after understanding this, comes the weeping of repentance.

One of the first monks, Ephrem the Syrian said that a face streaming with tears is indescribably beautiful (cf. Sermo Asceticus). The beauty of repentance, the beauty of weeping, the beauty of contrition! As always Christian life has its best expression in mercy. Wise and blessed are those who welcome the suffering that is bound to love because they will receive the comfort of the Holy Spirit which is the tenderness of God who forgives and corrects. God always forgives. Let us not forget this. God always forgives, even the worst of sins, always. The problem is within us who grow tired of asking for forgiveness. We withdraw into ourselves and we do not ask for forgiveness. This is the problem. But he is there to forgive us.

If we always remember that God "does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities" (Ps 103[102]:10), we will live in mercy and compassion, and love will appear within us. May the Lord grant us to love abundantly, to love with a smile, with closeness, with service and also with tears.

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 5 February 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

Today we are examining the first of the eight Beatitudes of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus begins to proclaim his path to happiness with a paradoxical announcement: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3). It is a surprising path and poverty is a strange condition for beatitude.

We have to ask ourselves: what does he mean here by the "poor"? If Matthew had only used this word, then the meaning would have been simply economic, that is, it would have meant people who have few

or no means of sustenance and are in need of the help of others.

However, unlike Luke's, the Gospel of Matthew speaks about "poor in spirit". What does this mean? According to the Bible, the spirit is the breath of life that God communicated to Adam: it is our most intimate dimension, let us say the spiritual dimension, the most intimate one, the one that makes us human beings, the profound core of our being. Thus, "the poor in spirit" are those who are and who feel poor, mendicants in their intimate being. Jesus proclaims them Blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

How many times have we been told the opposite! You have to be something in life, be someone ... One must make a name for oneself.... Loneliness and unhappiness stem from this: if I have to be "someone", then I am in competition with others and I worry excessively about my ego. If I do not accept being poor, I hate everything that reminds me of my fragility. Because this fragility prevents me from becoming an important person, someone who is rich, not only moneywise, even well-known: everything.

Before oneself, everyone knows well that, as much as one does one's best, he/she remains radically incomplete and vulnerable. There is no trick to cover up this vulnerability. Each of us is vulnerable inside. One has to see where. But how trying life is if one does not accept one's limitations! Life is hard. One lives poorly. One does not digest the limitation; [yet] it is there. Proud people do not ask for help. They cannot ask for help. It does not come easily to them to ask for help because they have to appear self-sufficient. And how many of them do need help, but their pride prevents them from asking for help. And how difficult it is to admit a mistake and ask for forgiveness! When I offer advice to newlyweds who ask me how to live their marriage well, I tell them: "There are three magic words: may I, thank you, I am sorry". They are words that come from poverty in spirit. One must not be intrusive but rather say excuse me: "Do you think it is good to do this?", so there can be dialogue in the family, spouses are in dialogue. "You did this for me, thank you I needed it". We always make mistakes, one slips: "I am sorry". And usually couples, newlyweds those who are here and are numerous tell me: "The third one is the hardest", saying sorry, asking for forgiveness. Because proud people cannot do this. They cannot say they are sorry: they are always right. They are not poor in spirit. The Lord instead, never grows tired of forgiving. Unfortunately, it is we who get tired of asking for forgiveness (cf. Angelus, 17 March 2013). The tiredness of asking for forgiveness. This is a bad state!

Why is it difficult to ask for forgiveness? Because it humiliates our hypocritical image. And yet, constantly seeking to hide one's weaknesses is tiring and distressing. Jesus Christ tells us: being poor is an opportunity for grace; and he shows us the way out from this difficulty. We are given the right to be poor in spirit because this is the path to the Kingdom of God.

But a fundamental thing must be mentioned: we do not have to transform ourselves to become poor in spirit. We do not have to undergo any transformation because we already are! We are poor ... or more clearly: we are "wretched" in spirit! We are in need of everything. We are all poor in spirit, we are beggars. It is the human condition.

The Kingdom of God is of the poor in spirit. There are those who have kingdoms in this world: they have goods and comforts. But they are kingdoms that end. The power of men and women, even of the greatest empires, pass and disappear. Often we see on the television news or in newspapers that that strong, powerful leader or that government that existed yesterday and no longer exists today, has fallen. The wealth of this world fades away and so does money. The elderly used to teach us that shrouds have no pockets. It is true. I never saw a removal truck behind a funeral procession: no one takes anything with them. This wealth stays here.

The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit. There are those who have kingdoms in this world, they have goods and comforts. But we know how they end. Only those who know how to love what is truly good more than themselves, reign. And this is the power of God.

In what way did Christ show his power? It was by doing what the kings of the earth do not do: give his life for mankind. And this is true power. The power of fraternity, the power of charity, the power of love, the power of humility. This is what Christ did.

Herein lies true freedom: those who have this power of humility, of service, of fraternity are free. The poverty praised in the Beatitudes is at the service of this freedom.

Because there is a poverty that we have to accept, that of being alive, and a poverty that instead we have to seek, the practical one, in the things of this world, in order to be free and to be able to love. We should always seek freedom of the heart, the freedom that has its roots in our own poverty.

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POPE FRANCIS  
GENERAL AUDIENCE  
Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 29 January 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

Today we are beginning a series of catecheses on the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel (5:1-11). This passage, which starts the "Sermon on the Mount", illuminated the lives of believers and also that of many non-believers. It is difficult not to be touched by these words of Jesus, and the desire to understand them and welcome them ever more fully is righteous. The Beatitudes provide the "identity card" of Christians — this is our identity card — because they outline the face of Jesus himself, his style of living.

Let us now frame Jesus' words within a wider context. Over the next catecheses we will comment on each individual Beatitude, one by one.

First of all, how the proclamation of this message occurred, is important: seeing the multitude that followed him, Jesus scaled the gentle slope overlooking the Sea of Galilee, sat down and, turning to the disciples, announced the Beatitudes. His message was thus addressed to his disciples. However, the multitude, that is, all of humanity, was on the horizon. It is a message for all of humanity.

Moreover, the "mount" recalls Sinai, where God gave Moses the Commandments. Jesus begins to teach a new law: to be poor, to be meek, to be merciful.... These "new commandments" are much more than a set of rules. Indeed, Jesus does not impose anything but reveals the way of happiness — his way — by repeating the word "blessed" eight times.

Each Beatitude is composed of three parts. Firstly, there is always the word "blessed". Then there is the situation in which the blessed find themselves: poverty of spirit, affliction, hunger and thirst for justice, and so on. Lastly, there is the reason for the beatitude, introduced by the conjunction "because": "Blessed are they because, blessed are those because...". The eight Beatitudes are like this and it would be good to learn them off by heart so as to repeat them, to have this law that Jesus gave us, precisely in

our minds and hearts.

Let us pay attention to this fact: the reason behind the Beatitudes is not a current situation, but rather the new condition that the blessed receive as a gift from God: because “theirs is the Kingdom of heaven”, because “they shall be comforted”, because “they shall inherit the earth” and so on.

In the third element which is the reason for happiness, Jesus often uses the future passive voice: “they shall be comforted”, “they shall be satisfied”, “they shall be forgiven”, “they shall be called children of God”.

But what does the word “blessed” mean? Because each of the eight Beatitudes begins with the word “blessed”. The original term does not mean one with a full belly or one who is doing well, but rather it is a person who is in a condition of grace, who progresses in God’s grace and progresses on God’s path: patience, poverty, service to others, comfort.... Those who advance in these things are happy and shall be blessed.

In order to give himself to us, God often chooses unthinkable paths, perhaps the path of our limitations, of our tears, of our defeats. It is the paschal joy of which our Oriental brothers and sisters speak, the one that has the stigmata but is alive, has been through death and has experienced the Power of God. The Beatitudes always bring you to joy. They are the paths to reach joy. It will do us good to take Matthew’s Gospel today, chapter 5, verses 1-11, and to read the Beatitudes — perhaps a few more times throughout the week — in order to understand this very beautiful path, so sure of the happiness the Lord offers us.

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POPE FRANCIS  
ANGELUS  
Saint Peter's Square  
Sunday, 13 February 2022

Dear brothers and sisters, buongiorno!

At the centre of the Gospel of today’s Liturgy are the Beatitudes (cf. Lk 6:20-23). It is interesting to note that despite being surrounded by a great crowd, Jesus, proclaims them by addressing “his disciples” (v. 20). He speaks to the disciples. Indeed, the Beatitudes define the identity of the disciple of Jesus. They may sound strange, almost incomprehensible to those who are not disciples; whereas, if we ask ourselves what a disciple of Jesus is like, the answer is precisely the Beatitudes. Let us take a look at the first one which is the basis for all the other ones: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God” (v. 20). Blessed are you poor. Jesus says two things of his people: that they are blessed and that they are poor; indeed, that they are blessed because they are poor.

In what sense? In the sense that Jesus’ disciples do not find their joy in money, power, or other material goods; but in the gifts they receive every day from God: life, creation, brothers and sisters, and so on. These are gifts of life. They are content to share even the goods they possess, because they live according to the logic of God. And what is the logic of God? Gratuitousness. The disciple has learned to live in gratuitousness. This poverty is also an attitude towards the meaning of life, because Jesus’ disciples do not think they possess it, that they already know everything, but rather they know they must learn every day. And this is poverty: the awareness of having to learn every day. Because they have

this attitude, Jesus' disciples are humble, open people, far from prejudice and inflexibility.

There was a good example in last Sunday's Gospel reading: Simon Peter, an expert fisherman, accepts Jesus' invitation to cast his nets at an unusual time, and then, filled with wonder at the miraculous catch, he leaves the boat and all his goods to follow the Lord. Peter shows himself to be docile by leaving everything, and in this way, he becomes a disciple. Instead, those who are too attached to their own ideas and their own securities, find it difficult to truly follow Jesus. They follow him a little, only in those things in which "I agree with him and he agrees with me", but then, as far as the rest is concerned, it goes no further. And this is not a disciple. And so, they fall into sadness. They become sad because things don't add up, because reality escapes their thinking patterns and they find they are dissatisfied. Disciples, on the other hand, know how to question themselves, how to humbly seek God every day, and this allows them to delve into reality, grasping its richness and complexity.

In other words, the disciple accepts the paradox of the Beatitudes: they declare that those who are poor, who lack many things and recognize this, are blessed, that is, happy. Humanly speaking, we are inclined to think in another way: happy are those who are rich, with many goods, who receive plaudits and are the envy of many, who have all the certainties. But this is a worldly mindset, it is not the way of thinking of the Beatitudes! Jesus, on the contrary, declares worldly success to be a failure, since it is based on a selfishness that inflates and then leaves the heart empty. Faced with the paradox of the Beatitudes, disciples allow themselves to be challenged, aware that it is not God who must enter into our mindset, but we into his. This requires a journey, sometimes wearisome, but always accompanied by joy. Because the disciple of Jesus is joyful, with the joy that comes from Jesus. Because, let us remember, the first word Jesus says is: blessed, hence the name of the Beatitudes. This is the synonym of being disciples of Jesus. By freeing us from the slavery of self-centredness, the Lord breaks our closures, dissolves our hardness, and opens up to us true happiness, which is often found where we do not expect it to be. It is he who guides our life, not us, with our preconceptions and our demands. Disciples, in the end, are those who let themselves be led by Jesus, who open their heart to Jesus, who listen to him and follow his path.

We might then ask ourselves: do I — each one of us — have the disciple's readiness? Or do I behave with the rigidity of one who believes him or herself to be right, who feels decent, who feels they have already arrived? Do I allow myself to be "inwardly unhinged" by the paradox of the Beatitudes, or do I stay within the confines of my own ideas? And then, with the logic of the Beatitudes, setting aside the hardships and difficulties, do I feel the joy of following Jesus? This is the decisive trait of the disciple: the joy of the heart. Let us not forget the joy of the heart. This is the touchstone for knowing if a person is a disciple: does he or she have joy in their heart? Do I have joy in my heart? This is the point.

May Our Lady, the first disciple of the Lord, help us live as open and joyful disciples.

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