

DAY 37: Contemplation**THE BEATITUDES [278]****Placing Oneself in the Presence of God***Preparatory Prayer:*

[46] ...to ask grace of God our Lord, that all my actions, intentions, and operations may be purely ordered to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.

History:

[278] OF THE SERMON THAT CHRIST PREACHED ON THE MOUNT, as written by Saint Matthew (Mt 5:1–12)

First: To His beloved disciples, apart from the rest, He speaks of the eight Beatitudes: (Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, those who weep, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, and those who suffer persecution).

Second: He exhorts them to make good use of their talents: (Thus let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven).

Third: He shows Himself not as a transgressor of the Law, but as its fulfillment, explaining the precepts not to kill, not to commit fornication, not to swear falsely, and to love one's enemies: (But I say to you: love your enemies and do good to those who hate you).

Composition of Place:

To see Christ on the mountain, teaching His disciples and the crowd.

Petition:

[104] ...to ask here for an interior knowledge of the Lord, who for me has become man, so that I may love Him more and follow Him.

Body of the Meditation

The Sermon on the Mount is a compendium of Christian doctrine, the solemn promulgation of the New Law. And the eight "Beatitudes" with which it begins are, in turn, a synthesis of that sermon and admirably condense the principles that constitute the ideal of the Christian life.

The Beatitudes

Through the practice of the Beatitudes the world was transformed, and Christians are asked to continue and deepen that transformation by fulfilling the Beatitudes before anyone else, since God has called us to the "front line" of the struggle against the world.

Our Lord begins by promising happiness and pointing out the means to attain it. Why does Jesus begin by speaking of happiness? Because in all men there exists an irresistible tendency to be happy, and happiness is the end they seek in each of their actions. Yet we know that many times they seek happiness where it cannot be found, where only misery exists.

Let us then listen to the Lord, who shows us where true happiness lies: where the END of our life is, and which are the MEANS to reach it.

The End Goal: ETERNAL LIFE

It is taught in each of the Beatitudes under various names: the Kingdom of Heaven, the Promised Land, perfect consolation, the fulfillment of our holy and legitimate desires, supreme mercy, the vision of our Father, etc.

The Order of the Beatitudes

The order of these Beatitudes is admirably explained by Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas: they proceed in ASCENDING order (unlike the Our Father, which “descends” from the consideration of God’s glory to that of our personal needs).

The first three refer to happiness found in fleeing from and being freed from sin: in poverty endured for love of God, in meekness, and in tears of contrition.

The next two belong to the active life of the Christian: they refer to hunger for justice and mercy toward one’s neighbor.

Then come those related to contemplation of divine mysteries: purity of heart, which disposes one to see God, and peace, which accompanies true wisdom.

Finally, the last—and most perfect—gathers together all the previous Beatitudes in the very heart of persecutions suffered for justice. These are the final trials, the indispensable condition for holiness. We shall follow this ascending order to form an exact idea of the perfection to which we have been called, and it may also serve us to examine how we have lived the Beatitudes up to now.

1. THE BEATITUDES THAT REFER TO FREEDOM FROM SIN

These Beatitudes correspond to the purgative way and are proper to beginners in the spiritual life.

a) Poverty of Spirit

While the world says that happiness lies in an abundance of riches and honors, Jesus Christ proclaims plainly and without preamble—with the firmness of Him who is Absolute Truth: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Each Beatitude has various degrees. In this case one could say:

Blessed are those who live in poverty without murmuring, without impatience or greed;

Blessed are those who, possessing worldly goods, do not set their hearts on riches or comfort, but live detached from earthly goods;

Still more blessed are those who have abandoned everything to follow Jesus Christ, embraced voluntary poverty, and live according to the spirit of that vocation; for they will receive a hundredfold in this life and afterward eternal life;
Finally, blessed are the poor or humble of heart, who do not cling to bodily goods, nor to spiritual goods, nor to reputation or honor, but seek only the KINGDOM OF GOD.

b) Meekness

While the desire for riches divides men and gives rise to quarrels, judgments, violence, and even wars between families and nations, Jesus says:

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land.”

Blessed are the meek who do not judge rashly, who do not see in their neighbor a rival to defeat or eliminate, but a brother to imitate or assist.

The meek do not stubbornly cling to their own judgment, but simply say: this is so, or this is not so, without swearing by heaven or by anything on earth (cf. Mt 5:27).

To preserve this meekness even toward the harsh or unpleasant, a close union is necessary with Him who said:

“Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29),

with Him who did not break the bruised reed nor extinguish the smoldering wick.

“That half-broken reed,” says Bossuet, “is often the enraged neighbor, shattered by his own anger; do not finish breaking him by revenge.”

The meekness spoken of here is not weakness that avoids conflict out of fear; it is a virtue that presupposes great love for God and neighbor. It is, as Saint Francis de Sales says, the flower of charity.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall POSSESS THE LAND, the true Promised Land, already becoming masters of the hearts of those entrusted to them.

c) Those Who Mourn

While the world says happiness consists in pleasures, Jesus teaches:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

To the rich man it was said:

“You received good things in your lifetime, and Lazarus evil things; now he is comforted, and you are in torment.”

Blessed are those who, like Lazarus, suffer patiently and without consolation from men, whose tears only God sees falling.

Still more blessed are those who weep for their sins and who, by an inspiration of the gift of knowledge, understand that sin is the greatest evil, and by their tears obtain forgiveness.

“Happier still,” says Saint Catherine of Siena (Dialogue, ch. 89), “are those who shed tears of love at the sight of the Infinite Mercy of God, of the goodness of the Savior, of the tenderness of the Good Shepherd who sacrifices Himself for His sheep. These already receive here below a CONSOLATION infinitely superior to that which the world can give.”

2. *THE BEATITUDES OF THE ACTIVE LIFE*

Once freed from evil, the soul that seriously seeks holiness finds other “joys” when it inclines toward good with all the energy of its heart.

a) *Hunger and Thirst for Justice*

A man of action, carried away by pride, proclaims: “Blessed is the one who lives and acts according to his own judgment, who is subject to no one and imposes himself on others.”

Jesus, in contrast, says:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.”

Justice, in the highest sense of the word, consists in giving God what is due to Him and giving to one’s neighbor, for love of God, all that is rightfully theirs. When this is fulfilled, Christ Himself is given to us as a reward.

Blessed are those who desire this justice to the point of hungering and thirsting for it, for they will be satisfied even in this life, becoming more just and holier.

Blessed is that thirst of which it has been written:

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink, and rivers of living water will flow from his heart” (Jn 7:37–38).

b) *The Merciful*

This “hunger and thirst for justice” must not be accompanied, in the actions of the Christian, by bitter zeal (“obsessive anger”) toward the guilty. That is why Jesus adds:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

In our life, as in God’s, justice must be united with mercy. Perfection is not possible without going, like the Good Samaritan, to help the sick and the afflicted.

Our Lord promised to reward those who give even a cup of water for love of Him, those who invite the poor, the disabled, and the blind to their table, as mentioned in the parable of the invited guests. If every Christian should feel more blessed in giving than in receiving, how much more the religious! Furthermore, he must be ready to forgive those who offend him, to forget injuries, and, before presenting his offering at the altar, to reconcile with his brother.

If all our actions were inspired by these two virtues—justice and mercy—our soul would already find here on earth a very holy joy and would be fully disposed to enter into the intimacy of God our Lord.

3. *THE BEATITUDES OF CONTEMPLATION AND UNION WITH GOD*

a) *The Pure of Heart*

Some philosophers thought that happiness consists in the knowledge of truth, especially the Supreme Truth. This was taught by Plato and Aristotle. But they scarcely cared about the “purity” of the heart, and their lives were, in more than one way, in contradiction with their teachings. Jesus, however, says: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” He does not say: Blessed are those with great intelligence and means to cultivate it. No, He says: blessed are those with a pure heart, even if their intellectual capacity is smaller, for they shall see God.

A pure heart is like the transparent water of a lake in which the blue of the sky is reflected; like a spiritual mirror in which the image of God is reproduced. But for the heart to be truly pure, generous mortification is necessary: “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off” (Mt 5:29–30).

To obtain a pure heart, it is especially necessary to guard the purity of intention: not to give alms for ostentation, nor to pray or work to gain the esteem of men, but to seek only the approval of the “Father who sees the secrets of the heart.”

Then the Christian SEES GOD in his neighbor (even in souls that at first seemed enemies); he sees Him in the Sacred Scriptures, in his family and friends, in the circumstances of his own life, and even in adversities, in which he contemplates the lessons of Divine Providence as a practical application of the Gospel.

b) The Peacemakers

This contemplation of God, even in this life, must be fruitful and provide peace, a radiant peace, as affirmed in the seventh Beatitude:

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

This Beatitude, say Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, corresponds to the GIFT OF WISDOM, which allows us to taste the mysteries of salvation and enables us to see, in some way, all things in God. This gift of wisdom makes us docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, which clarify the admirable order in the providential plan, even in painful and unforeseen cases that God permits for the sake of a greater good.

However, it would not be possible to contemplate and perceive in this way the designs of Divine Providence if peace—tranquility in order—had not first descended into our soul.

4. THE EIGHTH BEATITUDE

In the last Beatitude (the most perfect of all), Our Lord tells us that everything He has just said is supremely confirmed by the trials endured with love:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

These are the final trials, the indispensable condition of holiness. These astonishing words had never before been heard. They not only promise future happiness, but proclaim that we should consider ourselves blessed in the midst of afflictions and persecutions suffered for justice.

This is a wholly supernatural Beatitude, practically understood only by souls enlightened by God. This Beatitude is the most perfect because it belongs to those who are most conformed to the image of the crucified Jesus. To continue being humble, meek, and merciful in the midst of persecution—even toward one’s persecutors—and in the storm not only to preserve peace but also to offer it to others, therein lies the total perfection of the Christian life.

It is revealed above all in the final trials endured by perfect souls purified by God, who make sacrifices for the salvation of their neighbor.

Not all saints were martyrs, but all, to varying degrees, had to suffer persecution for justice; and all knew something of the inner martyrdom of Mary, the Sorrowful Mother.

Christ emphasizes the reward promised to those who suffer for justice:

“Blessed are you when men insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in the kingdom of heaven.”

From this parable arose in the souls of the apostles the desire for martyrdom and inspired the sublime words of a Saint Andrew or Saint Ignatius of Antioch. This parable became the very life of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Dominic, and Saint Ignatius of Loyola. That is why they were the “salt of the earth,” the “light of the world,” and their houses were built, not on sand, but on the solid rock; and why they were able to withstand every assault and remain steadfast despite it all.

Colloquy

End with three colloquies:

Colloquy to Our Lady: To obtain the grace from her Son and Lord, so that I may be received under her banner, first in supreme spiritual poverty, and if it pleases her Divine Majesty and she chooses to accept me, no less in actual poverty;

Second, to endure opprobrium and injuries in order to imitate Him more fully, provided I can do so without sinning against anyone or displeasing His Divine Majesty. End with one Hail Mary.

Colloquy to the Son: To ask Him for the same from the Father. End with the Anima Christi (“Soul of Christ”) prayer.

Colloquy to the Father: To ask Him to grant it. End with the Our Father (Pater Noster).