

Blessed are those persecuted... (Mt. 5:10-12)

Start with silence and reciting: *Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Everywhere present and filling all things, Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, Come and dwell within us, Cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O Gracious One. Amen.*

Then read these pages, reflect on each part, and do the Individual Reflection at the end. Hopefully this will enrich your understanding of this Beatitude and strengthen your faith. Conclude with this prayer from the Psalms as in the Typical Psalms of our Green Pew Book:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all my being bless his holy name. Blessed are you, O Lord.

Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the lord all my life.

I will make music to my God while I live. Amen.

Word of God

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others 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 heave, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Shedding Light

These two beatitudes are part of the relationship with 'others', part of the horizontal axes. In this case, however, they reflect the hostile reaction to the disciples. Hostility is not a consequence of the disciples' wrongdoing. They are persecuted because they do what is right. The righteousness equals 'on my account', that is, because of Jesus. They are persecuted because they are following Jesus' way.

The Wisdom of Solomon (Wisdom 1:16– 5:23) says:

Let us oppress the righteous poor man. . . . Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions. . . . He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord . . . he calls the last end of the righteous blessed, and boasts that God is his father . . . if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. . . . In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a

disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality (Wisdom of Sol 2:10, 12, 13, 16, 18; 3:2-4).

Also, St. Peter writes: **13** *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?* **14** *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,* **15** *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,* **16** *having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.* (1 Peter 3:13-16)

There are many heroes from the Israelite tradition, such as the prophets, who were killed for their faithfulness to God (5:12; 2 Chron 36:16; Nehemiah 9:26), and especially the martyrs who died for the sake of the Torah in the time of the Maccabees (2 Maccabees 6-7). God's presence and protection is promised to those who suffer as disciples of Jesus. Moreover, Peter makes clear how to behave in such hostile reactions:

9 *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.* **10** *For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit;* **11** *let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.* **12** *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.* (1 Peter 3:9-12)

Pope Francis (General Audience – April 29, 2020):

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.

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).

[] 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. 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.

Individual Reflection

- We do not face an open persecution of Christians in our country. However, there is a general tendency to do away with faith in the public square. Are we afraid to express our faith in public? As an individual? As a community?
- Do we participate in the March for Life? Prayers in front of abortion clinics? Do we engage with others to talk about the value of every life? Do we support those who stand for Christian values?
- Do we separate 'my faith' from 'my public engagement'? Where and how are we publicly engaged as a Christian community?
- How do we support persecuted Christians?
- Do we pray and bless our adversaries? Do we pray publicly for those who oppose Christ and His disciples?