

Blessed are the pure in heart (Mt. 5:8)

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 pure in heart, for they will see God.

Shedding Light

In Hebrew, the heart is the center of a person's inner life—it is the 'place, where I am who am; where I am with myself only'. The heart is a space deeper than emotions or intellect. The clean of heart are those who love God with undivided allegiance, with all their hearts (Deut 6:4). They pursue his will single-heartedly, without mixed motives. This beatitude echoes Ps 24:3-5 and Ps 73:1, where entrance into the temple required not only external purity but also the internal disposition of a clean heart:

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts.

The opposite of the pure or clean heart is the 'hypocrite'. This Greek term refers to the Greek theater designating the mask the actors were using during the performance. They did not show their true faces but used different masks to indicate different emotions. Jesus uses this term to refer to the Pharisees who do not show their true face neither before God nor before their human fellows (Mt 23:23-29).

The Rabbis commenting on the pure of heart (Ps 73:1) say: *Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart* (Derek 'Erets Rabba 2.19; cf. Gen. Rab. 41.1)

[on Gen 12:17]; Midr. Ps. 24.8 [on Ps 24:4]) [1] . Thus, already in the time of Jesus, purity of heart was viewed as assurance of God's protection and help. Jesus extends this notion to the eschatological vision of the face of God (1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Rev 22:4).

[1] C. Evans, *Matthew*, p. 107

Pope Francis (General Audience – April 1, 2020):

We read in the Psalm "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.

Individual Reflection

- Whom do I trust? What are my securities that I rely on? Am I sincere?
- How do I present myself before God? How do I approach him? Am I talking to him directly and in a personal manner? As to a friend? Or do I reduce my communication to 'saying the prayers' (reciting formal prayers I learned or using a prayer book)?
- How often do I receive the Mystery of Reconciliation (confession)?
- Do we trust each other in our community? Are we able to talk openly? Do we use 'masks' to hide our true faces? As a community, are we open to constructive criticism?
- Do we teach our children and youth to have a personal relationship with the Lord? Do we share our experiences with the Lord?
- Do we provide times of silence for personal prayer in the church? Do we keep silence in the church, before and after any service?
- Are we witnessing to the beauty and efficacy of the Mystery of Reconciliation? Do I encourage others to receive it? Do we encourage others to receive it? How do we motivate others to receive it?