

# Blessed are Those Who Mourn (Mt 5:4)

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 mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

### Shedding Light

Jesus' beatitudes represent a reversal of values, a reversal of the concept of the successful and happy life. He turns everything upside down. Those whom the world considers to be the most miserable—the poor, the mourning, the meek, the persecuted—Jesus proclaims to be in an advantageous situation. God looks with favor on them and assures them of his consolation. Jesus thus challenges his followers to see life from a new perspective, from God's viewpoint, and to leave behind the 'standards of the world'.

Ultimately, the beatitudes are the true portrait of Christ: Jesus as meek (Mt. 11:29; 12:15–21; 21:5), merciful (Mt. 9:27–31; 15:22; 17:14–18; 18:33; 20:29–34), and persecuted (Mt. 27:27–31, 39–44). As an indirect portrait of Jesus, the beatitudes "display the mystery of Christ himself, and they call us into communion with him."<sup>1</sup>

### The Mourning

The second beatitude concerns those who *mourn*. The Greek verb underlines that they are not passively supporting a disadvantageous, painful situation, but rather, they *actively mourn*. We have to look back at Isaiah (already quoted in the first beatitude):

*(Is. 61:2-3) The Lord sent me . . . to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.*

*(Is. 66:10) Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her.*

<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 74. See also Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 172

The reason for their affliction, weeping, and mourning, is the *disaster of Jerusalem*. In other words, they mourn for the sins committed and the suffering caused by those sins. They are conscious of wrong-doing and its consequences ... But they are also those who mourn for their own sins. The *mourning* is the *repentance* (Joel 1:8-9.13; James 4:9-10).

Mourning and comfort are often combined in the Bible (Gen 37:35; Is. 40:1-2; Jer 16:7; 31:13; 1 Chron 7:22; Job 29:25). The most important passage is (Is. 61:2) “to comfort all who mourn”, and (Jer 31:13) *Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow*. This is part of the prophecy of restoration, and covenant renewal. There is a rabbinic tradition in which the Messiah is sometimes called *Menahem*, or “Comforter” (from the Hebrew verb *naham*, which is found in (Is. 61:2 and Jer 31:13): “What is the name of the Messiah? . . . His name is ‘Comforter’” (Lam. Rab. 1:16 §51)<sup>2</sup> Thus, the promise of comfort evokes the prophetic assurance that in the last days the righteous and those who mourn “will be comforted”. The Messiah (Greek Christos – Christ) will comfort!

### **Pope Francis (General Audience – Catechesis on the Beatitudes, Feb. 12, 2020):**

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

<sup>2</sup> C. A. Evans, Matthew, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, p. 105

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.

***Individual Reflection continues on next page.***

## Individual Reflection

- What is my image of a successful life? Describe it for yourself!
- Am I sincerely willing to follow Jesus in 'his way'?
- Am I willing to risk mourning or affliction or even refusal because of him?
- Do I mourn my sins? Do I see my sins and failures?
- How do I view the mystery of reconciliation? How do I prepare for it? Do I mourn my sins because I regret that I betrayed Jesus' friendship?
- Is the mystery of confession/reconciliation 'a talk about my challenges' or is it a serious analysis of my failures, weaknesses, sins, misdeeds & good deeds, growth, achievements as well?
- Do I mourn the sins of others, the pain that they cause?
- Where do I search for comfort and consolation?
- As a community, do we 'weep with those who weep'? Do we seek to carry the burden of those who mourn, suffer, who are in any kind of trouble? How do we do it?
- What are the concrete signs of our compassion for them?
- Do we stay distant or involved with:
  - The poor and needy? How?
  - The grieving? How?
  - Those struggling in their faith or overwhelmed with doubts? How?
  - The lonely? How?
- Do I involve in our community those who are 'shy or afraid' to approach us/our events...?