

Pope Francis – Catechesis on the Beatitudes

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.

Individual Reflection:

- As an individual: whom do I trust? Do I count on the Lord first in my daily affairs – meaning I bring everything very openly and honestly to him first?
- As a community: where is our trust and strength? Do we count on the Lord first; do we approach him in prayer before any project? Do we spend time in prayer as a preparation for planning?
- Do we live in ‘clicks’ or are there genuine community relationships?
- How do we handle tensions? Do we talk to each other or rather get emotional, avoiding ‘them, the others’, and not talk to them anymore?
- What is the liturgy for me and for me? - What is the community for me? - family of fellow believers or club, where I contribute and attend certain events?

Blessed. Each Beatitude opens with the statement blessed (Greek makarios, Hebrew asher). It denotes blessedness or happiness not in the sense of an emotional state but in terms of being in a fortunate situation. This was often used in an ancient literary form known as beatitude - to introduce someone who is to be congratulated or praised for being in a privileged, even enviable, situation. There are many beatitudes in the Old Testament: “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, nor take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers” (Ps 1:1). “Happy are those who take refuge in Him” (Ps 34:8). “Blessed are all those who wait for Him” (Is 30:18; cf. 56:2). Usually, they promise happiness in the present time, however, Jesus opens new horizons. He announces blessings that begin to be experienced in this life and will be fully realized in the heavenly kingdom (cf. James 1:12). The structure of Jesus’ list may shed light on these two aspects. Jesus frames the beatitudes with the same blessing at the beginning and the end of this list—for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (5:3, 10) —“indicating that all the several kinds of blessedness are aspects of the one supreme blessing of possessing the Kingdom of Heaven”¹ — personal relationship with God here and now, following Jesus.

The First Beatitude

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit Mt 5:1-3

Word of God

- **Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Shedding Light

After the Baptism and Temptation (Mt 3:1 – 4:11), Jesus starts his public activity proclaiming the nearness of God (Mt 4:12-17). The Beatitudes must be seen within the context of Jesus' activity: he announces the Kingdom of heaven at hand (Mt 4:17), which simply means ‘God is close’, his activity enters human history, human lives. He is acting now. From this perspective, the Beatitudes point to the right and the only correct attitude toward God and neighbors. Thus, Jesus shows the correct mode to be disciples.

With the Beatitudes Jesus sets forth two relationships: vertical: that with God and horizontal: that with others. This recalls the Decalogue, the foundation of the Sinai covenant. Jesus is greater than Moses, he gives the new covenant. Furthermore, there are two existential states that do not depend primarily on the decision of a disciple. These are the reactions of others, non-disciples, in a word, the possible reactions of the world. No matter how ‘inconvenient’ and ‘comfort destroying’ these relationships are, Jesus shows the promises tied to them!

Poor in spirit

The exact phrase is found at Qumran (1QM 14.7). It uses “poor in spirit” in contrast to those with a “hardened heart”. In 4Q427 7.1–2, the poor are the opposite of those with a haughty heart. They are the humble before God. To these individuals with the right disposition toward God, the promise is given: the blessing, the kingdom of the heavens is theirs (5:3b). Remember that in Matthew the kingdom of heaven/God refers to both the ultimate blessing of the age to come and to the activity of God in the present that causes that blessing to come. It means God’s closeness in daily life. The “poor in spirit” echoes (Is 61):

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; (2) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

It is worth noting, that the Messiah brings the good news to the poor. It implies that only the poor in spirit are able to receive it!

The opposite of the poor in spirit are men who will not humble themselves and become like children (Mt 18:3; 19:14). They may also be persons who cannot part with their wealth (Mt 19:23), “it is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven”). They may also be scribes and Pharisees, whose righteousness is inadequate (Mt 5:20) and who in fact “lock people out of the kingdom of heaven” but do not enter it themselves (Mt 23:13). The poor in spirit are those who put their hope and trust in the Lord. Those who have no other security but the Lord.