

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)

When we meditate on this first Beatitude, we tend to focus on the word 'poor', associating it with physical poverty. But is there any virtue in being poor, unless it is willingly embraced for the higher glory of God, such as when a missionary leaves his rich homeland to serve the poor in a foreign land? Similarly, is there a kind of special sinfulness in being rich from hard earned cash?

What does, then, 'poor in spirit' mean?

- To be poor in spirit is to recognize that all we have is God's gift: our families, our friends, our health, our talents, our successes and indeed our very existence! This is the proper religious attitude of poverty. If we are to be honest with ourselves, we come to acknowledge our neediness, our intellectual limitations, our spiritual inadequacy, and our moral failures; and in this helplessness we turn to God. Yes we turn to God just like the publican in Luke 18:13. Unlike the Pharisee who was puffed up with pride, the publican stood at the back of the temple and would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said 'God have mercy on me, a sinner'.
- To be poor in spirit is to avoid preoccupations with money and worldly goods; and to make use of these only to the extent of meeting our basic needs, rather than hoarding possessions to build our 'self-sufficient empires'.
- To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge the need to use our talents, intelligence, possessions and the like, to help others; in other words, to voluntarily make ourselves poor by making sacrifices of our time, our skills and our wealth on behalf of others.
- To be poor in spirit is to renounce cultural addictions such as excessive consumerism and materialism, which withdraw us from the true image of God and push us into a fake way of life. As the apostle Paul exclaimed in Philippians 3:8 when he discovered the way, the truth and the real life in Christ " I count all things as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them as dung, that I may win Christ".
- To be poor in spirit is a renewed state of the mind and heart, pertaining to the disposition of the soul. It is not a matter of whether we are the poorest of the poor or the richest of the rich, although the rich are more in danger of falling in the realm of self sufficiency which alienates them from the grace of God. It is a matter of our internal disposition. It stands for our complete openness before God, for freedom from our pride, freedom from believing that we have the power to save ourselves, freedom from our ideas and opinions, freedom from our vain imaginings of our own heart.

Theirs is the kingdom of Heaven

To embrace detachment from worldly desires requires of us to humbly surrender before almighty God. It is a painful on-going process, but so liberating! It is only through this humility that a capacity for the closest possible intimacy with God is created, drawing us to a life which we can truly enjoy as we learn to accept God's will for us.

It is to the humble heart that God reveals the secret of the Eternal Kingdom. For 'to them little ones', (Matthew 11:25) the Father is pleased to reveal what remains hidden from the wise and the learned who are too preoccupied with the accumulation of purely intellectual knowledge.

The kingdom of Heaven brings a new reality to our daily life, a life of peace, light, freedom, contentment and blessedness, even among our many trials and sufferings.

Questions for reflection:-

- 'Thank you Lord God and forgive me Lord God' was one of the maxims of St George Preca. How often have I failed to thank God for my family, friends, community, health and indeed my very existence?
- Do I walk the extra mile to put the use of God's gifts to reach out for others?
- Have I truly surrendered to God's will in my life or am I still hanging on to worldly or even more subtle, to my 'intellectual knowledge' as my only security?

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