

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.*

Matthew 5, 3-11

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

This first Beatitude has a profoundness and an extent which make it seem to embrace all the others: it is almost a “title”, as if the ones which follow define and amplify the expression “poor in spirit” which characterises the first one.

Thus in this first Beatitude, as in the last one, we come across the expression “the Kingdom of heaven”. From the literary and thematic aspect, it constitutes an “inclusion”. That is, it helps to emphasize how the whole passage is strongly linked. It has to be read and understood in its totality, as if every Beatitude gives a piece of a puzzle, which only in its completeness reveals God’s heart, the overwhelming news of the Gospel. But it also means that the conclusions of the other Beatitudes, inserted between these two, focus and show aspects and dimensions of the Kingdom: they are like the colours of the iris of one and the same rainbow.

Who are these “poor in spirit” whom Jesus proclaims as blessed?

We could translate this expression simply like this “blessed are those who are poor in front of God”. It is neither a purely economic criteria nor an exclusively spiritual attitude.

Poverty in spirit, being poor before God, means standing before God as a poor person, like one who has no riches or security which he can brag about or on which he can rely. Without the Lord he would not be living because He is his life.

The poor in spirit are those who feel and live Jesus as the most precious gift, the greatest richness of their life. Their heart is a casket, but it contains the Gospel, contains the Lord!

This brings about a profound change in our relationship with people and things. If at the centre of our lives there is the gift which we have received, which is gratuitousness, and the amazement of being loved, then we become “blessed”. We are happy to make others happy, to give joy to others through the gift of self, with the gift of our life by being welcoming and by serving. They are “blessed” because their happiness does not depend on what they possess but on what they give, on that which they receive as a gift and which they multiply by passing on to others. And as they have received the Gospel, the Kingdom, the person of Jesus as gifts, they are happy and they transmit this happiness to others.

But this “poverty in spirit” changes also our attitude towards things, towards life’s goods; towards how much we have, possess, use. The person of Jesus, welcomed and lived as the greatest richness, helps us to see the other goods in the right perspective. Above all it frees us from greed, from that anxiety to possess, from that thirst to own and to use. This is the great idol of our heart, of our western civilization, but also the great destruction of the relations between peoples and countries and of our relationship with the planet’s resources.

At the centre there is giving rather than possessing, loving rather than having! But being “poor in spirit” also makes us able to “see” the poor: the actual poor, those without adjectives, and these are on the increase in our cities and in our country, a tragic enormity in the world!

This gives us the opportunity to look at them with our heart’s eyes, with that sympathetic look, with attention, with that closeness with which Jesus looked at them and looked for them. He loved them and became one of them “foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head”. Looking at the poor with the eyes of one who is “poor in spirit, poor in front of God” means using your head and your hands to understand, to act, to solve. It also means making your voice heard, raising awareness, so that our cities may become more human and our Christian communities more attentive to people and show more love for the poor. Precisely because they believe in a “poor Lord”: this Beatitude, the Beatitudes, open for us, for the Church, the uncomfortable but beautiful way of prophecy.

In conclusion: it is not poverty which makes us blessed, it is the Beatitude which makes us poor: in our hearts, in our relations, towards things. It is the Lord, the meeting with the person of Christ. It is the Gospel in our hearts which makes us happy and sowers of happiness.

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MEN OF THE EIGHT BEATITUDES

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati



"Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (1 Peter 3:15).

In our century, Pier Giorgio Frassati incarnated these words of St. Peter in his own life. The power of the Spirit of Truth, united to Christ, made him a modern witness to the hope which springs from the Gospel and to the grace of salvation which works in human hearts. Thus he became a living witness and courageous defender of this hope in the name of Christian youth of the twentieth century.

Faith and charity, the true driving forces of his existence, made him active and diligent in the milieu in which he lived, in his family and school, in the university and society; they transformed him into a joyful, enthusiastic apostle of Christ, a passionate follower of his message and charity. The secret of his apostolic zeal and holiness is to be sought in the ascetical and spiritual journey which he traveled; in prayer, in persevering adoration, even at night, of the Blessed Sacrament, in his thirst for the Word of God, which he sought in Biblical texts; in the peaceful acceptance of life's difficulties, in family life as well; in chastity lived as a cheerful, uncompromising discipline; in his daily love of silence and life's "ordinariness."

POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II'S HOMILY FROM THE BEATIFICATION MASS OF BLESSED PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI - ROME, MAY 20, 1990



I always like to link the Gospel Beatitudes with Matthew 25, where Jesus presents us with the works of mercy and tells us that we will be judged on them.

I ask you, then, to rediscover the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, assist the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. Nor should we overlook the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the

doubtful, teach the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the sorrowful, forgive offences, patiently bear with troublesome people and pray to God for the living and the dead. As you can see, mercy does not just imply being a “good person” nor is it mere sentimentality. It is the measure of our authenticity as disciples of Jesus, and of our credibility as Christians in today’s world.

If you want me to be very specific, I would suggest that for the first seven months of 2016 you choose a corporal and a spiritual work of mercy to practice each month. Find inspiration in the prayer of Saint Faustina, a humble apostle of Divine Mercy in our times:

*“Help me, O Lord,
...that my eyes may be merciful, so that I will never be suspicious or judge by appearances, but always look for what is beautiful in my neighbours’ souls and be of help to them;
... that my ears may be merciful, so that I will be attentive to my neighbours’ needs, and not indifferent to their pains and complaints;
... that my tongue may be merciful, so that I will never speak badly of others, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all;
... that my hands may be merciful and full of good deeds;
... that my feet may be merciful, so that I will hasten to help my neighbour, despite my own fatigue and weariness;
... that my heart may be merciful, so that I myself will share in all the sufferings of my neighbour” (Diary, 163).*

Pope Francis for WYD Krakow 2016

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