



YOUTH COORDINATION



*To the very heart
of the Gospel*

with
Blesséd Pier Giorgio



The man of the eight Beatitudes

IFCA – International Forum Catholic Action

*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

INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTS TO THE BEATITUDES

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Rome, July 2016





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

The Beatitudes

We are at the core of the Gospel. If we want to summarize Christ's message, the gist of all the Christian message, in short, in a few words, we could repeat the Beatitudes. Christianity is the radiation of this core, the explosion of this "nucleus".

I would like to try not to cover the subject but at least to introduce it by putting four questions.

For whom are the Beatitudes?

The passage from the Gospel of Matthew opens with the words "seeing the crowds..." (5:1) and the preceding chapter closes with this statement "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him." (4:25).

The above territories cover a wide geographic area which crosses Israel's narrow ethnic-religious strip and leads to pagan cities and peoples. Seen in a new light: it is the wide human geography that Matthew gathers round Jesus to receive from Him the gift and the challenges of the Beatitudes.

Therefore, the proposal is not made to a selective few, it is not made to a few heroes: it is an invitation to the whole Church, to every Christian.

The Beatitudes look at and speak to poor people like us, people from all conditions of life. They do not concern only the selected few, the saints, but also common men like me. Then, we too are on the Mount of the Beatitudes; and so those words are put into our hands and on our hearts, so that we may be able to assimilate them and propose them to other people as they are.

They have their feet on the ground and have heaven in their heart!

But where has Jesus learnt the Beatitudes?

Definitely, they bring together so many passages from the first alliance, especially Israel's prophetic message and spiritual experience. But they are not findings from these contributions, they are not a series of addenda. The Beatitudes are "more than this". The Beatitudes come from "above".

Jesus heard them in the heart of the Blessed Trinity; he read them in God's heart!

They tell us that God is poor, is meek, is merciful, is pure, is a peacemaker, and carries the weight of our suffering.

Before telling us what we should do and how we should be, the Beatitudes speak to us about God, who He is, how He is: they are the exegesis of God's heart.

If the Father is so, then so should His children be: Jesus, the Son, is thus the first person of the Beatitudes, the living Beatitudes, and we, children in His image, children in the Son, are called to be persons of the Beatitudes: fragments of the Beatitudes, seeds of joy which inhabit the world, which live through the ages. Like flames: glittering flames in the night!

What do the Beatitudes say?

They cover three periods: the present, the future and the past.

The present looks at people, who suffer, struggle, groan or are in dismay, in the face: they are history's and life's crucifixes. They are the thousand faces of suffering. They are those from whom we instinctively escape and guard ourselves.

The future is the promise, the commitment which God personally makes in their regard: He will change their situation, He will wipe their every tear, He will make their deserts flower: their life, which presently moans, will turn into a dance.

It is the Kingdom, the gift of the Kingdom which already is amongst them within their fatigue and their lament. It is there, like a grain of wheat in the earth's grooves which are the wounds of the earth. Therefore, full happiness and fullness of life are not attained through craftiness, power and the idolatry of "things", but through the Cross, that is through loving, giving and serving, choices inspired by the logic of life, the logic of Jesus.

The past: the warranty, basis and motivation behind this change in situations lies in the past, in what happened in past human history which has changed the order of things. It is Jesus Himself, His death and Resurrection. He is the

presence of the Kingdom amongst us and which is advancing towards its fulfilment. He is the reliability of the Gospel as a way of life.

The day of His Resurrection is the prophecy of the last day towards which we are journeying, it is the tacit but tenacious light, which enlightens us day after day, even during the most painful and grey ones.

How do we announce the Beatitudes?

The answer is short but vast: it is becoming ourselves persons of the Beatitudes. We: individuals, families, parishes, CA associations, Church. And this means feeling and experiencing the person of Jesus and His Gospel as something precious, as a treasure, as the greatest gift that we have come across in our lives.

But it also means being close to those who are materially and spiritually poor, to those who suffer, by assuming a fraternal and welcoming approach with our whole heart and through our deeds: by showing them that mercy which God never tires of showing us.

We have to move from words to deeds, from the Beatitudes which are just words to the Beatitudes as a way of life.

In this way, the Beatitudes are a door, a threshold which we pass through to proceed towards God - and this is Faith -, the threshold we cross to go out towards our brethren - and this is Love.

1 BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVENE

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 cared 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.



with Blessed Pier Giorgio

"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

2 BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

The expression alludes to the prophet Isaiah (61:1-6) where he refers to the weeping on Jerusalem, the city of God, reduced to rubble and abandoned in extreme desolation.

Who are those who mourn, here proclaimed as “blessed”? What type of mourning do we mean here?

The reference to the text from Isaiah says that Jesus primarily is referring to those who face situations where they experience suffering and fatigue for the sake of His person and the Gospel. It is an evangelizing and missionary suffering. They are those, who from personal experience, know how hard the Kingdom of God has to strive to win people’s hearts; how daily and historical events differ from this and sometimes outright assume an attitude of refusal and aggression towards the Gospel and the disciples of Jesus.

How can we not think of the XX century, which has just passed? It was the most bloody century and the century most marked by persecution that history has ever known.

How can we not think of the XXI century which has started in a lake of blood, with Christians and religious minorities slaughtered, sent away and persecuted without mercy?

How can we not think of “God’s sorrow”, of God’s mourning” because His person becomes the target of hatred and oppression and because of the killing among His children? The “mourning” which the Beatitude speaks about is, even today, the suffering which results from grief, disasters, injustices: the groaning of poor people who are defenceless and helpless when entire civilizations laugh and are lost in luxury and waste.

The “weeping” is the pain, very often hidden, and at times evident, which a person experiences because of suffering, mourning, abandonment and solitude... It is the boundless geography of human suffering which this second Beatitude refers to.

This “mourning” calls for our presence, our involvement, our sharing in the suffering and our affection. Faced by the mourning on the refusal of the Gospel, on the hardness of heart, on murderous violence, on the numberless facets of human suffering, the disciple of Jesus cannot be a citizen of that city of indifference, superficiality, disrespectfulness: that Babylon where there is neither weeping nor compassion for the suffering of the poor (cfr. Apoc. 18:7). The Christian is a human presence which ensures compassion, closeness and concrete help.

We are not spared from mourning nor are we freed from pain through any kind of privilege or through anesthesia. We suffer like anyone else and with everyone else but within us we have the reasons of a consolation, of a strength and of a struggle, of a hope which is the greatest gift given us by God, and which we pass on to others when they mourn and when we mourn. This is what the last part of the Beatitude means by “for they shall be comforted”. In the semitic language, the impersonal use of the verb means “because God himself will console them”. Definitely these are not consoling empty words nor are they simply a pat on the shoulder!

God has comforted us in the person of Jesus, who experienced grief and human suffering until the end. He took our suffering, our death on Him, He suffered injustice and violent oppression, not because one more victim could make a difference in human history, but to break down the wall of desperation and dismay, to give a meaning, a value, a purpose to the mourning of individuals and of peoples, of saints and sinners in order to widen hope’s horizon for everyone.

This leads us to four conclusions: to go through the inevitable sorrowful and painful situations as “comforted” (definitely not as spared): “so that you may not be like the rest, who have no hope” as Saint Paul wrote to the Christian community in Thessalonica; to be persons, who have Ariadne’s thread within them, so that they will not get lost and perish in the labyrinth of pain: our Lord’s Cross; to be zealous for the Kingdom, for the Gospel, without sparing any effort and commitment to be its living witness and to share it with other persons and whole cities; to be a point of comfort, support for each other, especially for those who are most tried and alone.

Let us always keep in mind our goal, our meeting with the person of Jesus, who is our hope, our strength, our consolation for: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away." (Apoc. 21:3-5).



with Blessed Pier Giorgio

Certainly, at a superficial glance, Frassati's lifestyle, that of a modern young man who was full of life, does not present anything out of the ordinary. This, however, is the originality of his virtue, which invites us to reflect upon it and impels us to imitate it. In him faith and daily events are harmoniously fused, so that adherence to the Gospel is translated into loving care for the poor and the needy in a continual crescendo until the very last days of the sickness which led to his death. His love for beauty and art, his passion for sports and mountains, his attention to society's problems did not inhibit his constant relationship with the Absolute. Entirely immersed in the mystery of God and totally dedicated to the constant service of his neighbor: thus we can sum up his earthly life!

He fulfilled his vocation as a lay Christian in many associative and political involvements in a society in ferment, a society which was indifferent and sometimes even hostile to the Church. In this spirit, Pier Giorgio succeeded in giving new impulse to various Catholic movements, which he enthusiastically joined, but especially to Catholic Action, as well as Federation of Italian Catholic University Students [FUCI], in which he found the true gymnasium of his Christian training and the right fields of his apostolate. In Catholic Action he joyfully and proudly lived his Christian vocation and strove to love Jesus and to see in him the brothers and sisters whom he met on his way or whom he actively sought in their places of suffering, marginalization and isolation, in order to help them feel the warmth of his human solidarity and the supernatural comfort of faith in Christ.

He died young, at the end of a short life, but one which was extraordinarily filled with spiritual fruits, setting out for his "true homeland and singing God's praises."

Pope Saint John Paul II's Homily from the Beatification mass of
Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati - Rome, May 20, 1990

3 BLESSED ARE THE MEEK FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE LAND

Who are the “meek”? The term refers us to Psalm 36(37) where the personality and the behaviour of a meek person are treated at length. Jesus nearly literally takes the third Beatitude from this Psalm (v.11).

In this same Gospel by Matthew, we come across the term “meek” only three times, and in the other two instances (11:29 and 21:5) it refers to Jesus himself: thus meekness characterizes Christ himself and his behaviour, He who is “meek and humble of heart”. The thoughts, sentiments, judgements and actions of every disciple, of every Christian originate from Him, are inspired by Him and fulfilled in Him. It is as if every believer in the Gospel is called to follow a way marked by meekness and laboriously but tenaciously keep going in that direction.

The meek person is the one who, like Jesus, reveals God’s face through His life: a good, serene, approachable face, which is not influenced or conditioned by our wickedness, our indifferences and betrayals. The meek person’s face translates God’s outstretched hand, His open heart, His open arms which do not withdraw when faced by refusal, offence or any other misdeed.

The meek are not “beautiful souls” which fly like doves above the flood of conflicts, violence and human bullying. The meek, disciple of the Gospel, is not spared but is “deeply involved” in history, he is immersed in life, just as he is, like everyone else.

But he is truly courageous because he can face suffering and violence without giving in or complying.

He is truly strong because he does not confront strength with strength but prefers to endure it rather than use it. He does not try to triumph over others but seeks the slow, disputed and defenceless victory of the good: he believes firmly in love, not as a poet but as a prophet, not as a dreamer but as a witness.

Because of this, the clothes of the meek are very often tinged with red!

And yet, it is their sufferings, their apparently human defeats and setbacks which help the Kingdom of God grow, just like the Cross. These help to spread the Gospel in the world because their journey in life is like an artery which conducts it into humanity's body.

Meekness is also a way of being part of the community, of living as a Church: it is the way of keeping united. It keeps us from breaking up in factions and siding with groups. It fosters communion among all brethren, and puts charity as the ultimate peak, the supreme value to work for and to serve. And this without renouncing the truth, prophecies, fraternal correction and frank and loyal relations.

This is definitely difficult but it is also amazingly possible if the heart of the disciple, of every Christian, is imbued and led by the meekness of Jesus, by His word and by His Spirit.

The promised gift is that the meek "will inherit the land". It is interesting that the verb does not indicate an achievement but a gift: that gift which the Father gives to His son when He has tried and wished to live as a brother.

The "land" referred to here, originally, was (cfr. Psalm 36(37)), the land of Palestine, promised to the people of Israel; it later undergoes a transformation, it becomes a symbolic "land": it is the land of the Kingdom of God, that is a life shared with God and with our brethren, wherein we find our "land", "native land" for each other, because it becomes the cause of joy and peace, we become "heaven" for one another!

It is the tiresome "heaven" down here in expectation for the one above.

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with Blessed Pier Giorgio

Today's celebration invites all of us to receive the message which Pier Giorgio Frassati is sending to the men and women of our day, but especially to you young people, who want to make a concrete contribution to the spiritual renewal of our world, which sometimes seems to be falling apart and wasting away because of a lack of ideals.

By his example he proclaims that a life lived in Christ's Spirit, the Spirit of the Beatitudes, is "blessed", and that only the person who becomes a "man or woman of the Beatitudes" can succeed in communicating love and peace to others. He repeats that it is really worth giving up everything to serve the Lord. He testifies that holiness is possible for everyone, and that only the revolution of charity can enkindle the hope of a better future in the hearts of people.

Yes, "tremendous are the deeds of the Lord. Shout joyfully to God all you on earth" (Ps 66:1-3). The verse of the Psalm resound in this Sunday liturgy as a living echo of young Frassati's soul. Indeed, we all know how much he loved the world God created! "Come and see the works of God" (Ps 65/66:5): this is also an invitation which we receive from his young soul and which is particularly addressed to young people.

Come and see God's "tremendous deeds among men" (ibid.). Tremendous deeds among men and women! Human eyes -- young, sensitive eyes -- must be able to admire God's work in the external, visible world. The eyes of the spirit must be able to turn from this external, visible world to the inner, invisible one: thus they can reveal to others the realm of the spirit in which the light of the Word that enlightens every person is reflected (cf. Jn 1:9). In this light the Spirit of Truth acts.

Pope Saint John Paul II's Homily from the Beatification mass of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati - Rome, May 20, 1990

4

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED

There is a key-term, so to say an entrance door, which we should go through, in order to understand the fourth Beatitude well: “righteousness” This word has a particular importance in the Sermon on the Mount because Jesus makes a fundamental difference which distinguishes the disciple from the Pharisees and it is a basic condition to enter the Kingdom: “ I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20), and more “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given you besides” (Mt 6:33).

But which “righteousness” is He speaking about?

Instinctively we think of the legal aspect, of economic dealings, of social relations. Definitely, in a certain sense, Christ’s expression does not exclude these dimensions but goes further and deeper. The “righteousness” which he speaks about is the recognition, the acceptance, the realization of God’s project, of His will full of love and closeness towards people and their lives. It is therefore not a detached, cold and enigmatic will, much less a hostile, punitive or aggressive one.

“Righteousness” welcomes, serves, promotes people’s and world events. It is that project which is full of love, longing and unlimited passion with which the Father loves each of His children and calls him to that fullness of happiness and joy and gives him to others, to the Church and to the world as a unique and precious brother.

“Righteousness” is that desire for the salvation of every wounded, lost and distressed man, for whom Jesus was driven to embrace the cross, so that we may not remain helpless and desperate on the crosses which life presents and which we sometimes bring about for one another.

Being hungry and thirsty for righteousness then means trying to find that “righteousness” of God with all our strength. It is longing for His love, His project for us, with that same enthusiasm and determination with which we

guard our life, realizing that without this “righteousness” life itself remains dull, cold and crushed under “a sky of bronze”, more similar and near to death itself.

Being hungry and thirsty for righteousness means basing every effort and commitment for the promotion of human dignity on the solid and reliable foundation, that is on God’s will and project. You are “hungry and thirsty for righteousness when you know that God supports you in your struggles and fatigue and shares in your fervour so that each and every man may experience the joy of living and enjoy the dignity of having a name and of being significant and esteemed. The “righteousness” of God enkindles in you a passion for man, entrusts you with history and leaves every day in your hands.

It is up to you, together with your travelling companions, with your brethren, to start spelling out an answer to this, every moment of each day and in every detail of your life. May the Lord guide you to find this reply within you and to look to the future until one day He Himself brings it to completion by helping you reach the fullness of that Kingdom towards which, with Jesus, we have started journeying in this life.



with Blessed Pier Giorgio

This question which the young man in the Gospel asks may seem far from the concerns of many young people today. As my Predecessor observed, “Are we not the generation whose horizon of existence is completely filled by the world and temporal progress? (Letter to Young People, No. 5). Yet, the question of “eternal life” returns at certain painful moments of our lives, as when we suffer the loss of someone close to us or experience failure.

But what is the “eternal life” to which the rich young man is referring? Jesus describes it to us when he says to his disciples: “But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you” (Jn 16: 22). These words point to an exciting possibility of unending happiness, to the joy of being surrounded by God’s love for ever.

Wondering about the definitive future awaiting each of us gives full meaning to our existence. It directs our life plan towards horizons that are not limited and fleeting, but broad and deep, and which motivate us to love this world which God loves so deeply, to devote ourselves to its development with the freedom and joy born of faith and hope. Against these horizons we do not see earthly reality as absolute, and we sense that God is preparing a greater future for us. In this way we can say with Saint Augustine: “Let us long for our home on high, let us pine for our home in heaven, let us feel that we are strangers here” (Tractates on the Gospel of Saint John, Homily 35:9). His gaze fixed on eternal life, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, who died in 1925 at the age of 24, could say: “I want to live and not simply exist!” On a photograph taken while mountain-climbing, he wrote to a friend: “To the heights”, referring not only to Christian perfection but also to eternal life.

Dear young friends, I urge you to keep this perspective in developing your life plan: we are called to eternity. God created us to be with him, for ever. This will help you to make meaningful decisions and live a beautiful life.

Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI on the occasion
of the twenty-fifth world Youth Day - March 28, 2010

5 BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED

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with Blessed Pier Giorgio

"Dear young people, have the courage to choose what is essential in life! "Living, and not just managing to get by!", Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati often used to say. Like him, you will discover that it is worth committing yourself to God and with God, to answer his call in your fundamental and your daily decisions, even at a cost!"

The spiritual journey of Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati reminds us that the journey of Christ's disciples demands the courage to come out of oneself, to follow the path of the Gospel. You live this demanding path of the spirit in your parishes and in other ecclesial realities. You also live it during the pilgrimage of the World Youth Days, (...)"

Meeting with the young people- -Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI
2 May 2010

6 BLESSED ARE THE PURE OF HEART FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

There are two words which we should consider carefully so as not to lose and spoil the beauty of this Beatitude: “heart” and “pure”.

The heart, as understood in the Bible, is the source of a person’s life: it is that profoundness, that root from where man’s thoughts, feelings, decisions and actions stem; it is here that man’s relations with God and with others originate. The heart is our life’s centre of synthesis and unifying point: the origin, from where life is channelled into the different parts.

“Pure”, in the Bible, is that which pertains to the sphere of God, that which corresponds to Him, which resembles Him, which reflects Him. Purity makes a person worthy to stand before God, to receive Him, to experience the Alliance, reciprocity.

Very soon in the Bible, the revelation links the two terms together and refers to the heart as the place and the seat of purity (Cf. Psalms 15; 24; 73; Is 33:14-16; Jr 24:7; Ez 18:5-9; etc.).

Matthew, the Evangelist, treats the theme in two passages: in 15:1-20 where Jesus says that a person’s purity does not depend on what he touches or eats but on his heart, on his intentions, on the centre of gravity of his life. The second text is 23:21-39, in the polemic with the Pharisees, where the point emerges that for Jesus, true purity is that which is interior, loyal, where truth is loved and lived, and is transparent. This is precisely purity of the heart.

Therefore, the “pure of heart” is not to be understood (as affirmed from the XIX century onwards) with predominant reference to chastity or to the right use of sexuality but in a wider and more profound sense. It concerns the whole human person and includes one’s intentions and the true and willing openness to the Lord and to one’s brethren.

The opposite of the “pure of heart” is not only he who is won over by his impulses and by his sexual instincts (which are not ruled and purified by the demanding logic of love) but is the hypocrite, the one who is double-faced, who bases more on appearances than on the being, the one who gives more importance to the skin than to the heart. The hypocrite is more preoccupied

about himself as a figure than as a person. The person is a face, the figure is a mask; the person is an identity and is thus truth, transparency, it is the heart which reveals itself; the figure is an appearance and thus it is a shop-window, it is a distortion, it weakens and obscures the heart.

This hypocrisy becomes even more dramatic in the life of a Christian, because it reduces the centre of the evangelic message, that is the “heart”, to a cover which hides and protects an idolatrous life. This is what the great Bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, wrote to the Christian Community when he was awaiting his martyrdom: “it is better to be a Christian without saying it than say that you are a Christian without being one”!

Thus the pure heart refers to the “new heart” announced by the prophets, that is, it is the source within a person, the centre of his life, which is renewed by the gift and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

According to the Gospel, the “pure of heart” whom Jesus calls “blessed” are the simple, the lowly, the children: “if you do not become as little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”. The pure of heart are the disciples, with their desire and commitment to follow Jesus. “For they shall see God”. The effect of this Beatitude opens out in two directions. Purity, clearness of heart, makes it possible for us to see “beyond” the heart itself, and the “beyond” of the heart is God. A person with a pure heart is an open window on God! Through his person, his words and his deeds, one catches a glimpse of the Lord’s face, of His closeness to our life. It is what people notice, at times even in an intuitive manner, when they come across a saint: with or without a halo. The pure heart is a transparent heart, like a window’s clean glass pane, through which you see further than your room, you see the outside, you see the sky!

But “seeing God” is also life’s landing stage, the goal of the Christian journey (cf. 1Co 13:10ss; 1Jn 3:2ss; Apoc. 22:4ss): it is the fullness of communion, it is the marriage encounter.

When the author of the Apocalypse wanted to describe heaven’s Jerusalem, the city which, with fatigue and courage, we daily try to reach, he says that it is “like a crystal” (21:18). It is a city where transparency, purity, brightness prevail; it is the city where God is unveiled, where God can be seen. He is

Himself a gift of a fraternal and warm reciprocity, He lacks nothing and there is nothing obscure about Him. It is towards this “crystal city” that we try to advance today, while we let the Holy Spirit purify our “heart”.



with Blessed Pier Giorgio

What does it mean to be “blessed” (makarioi in Greek)? To be blessed means to be happy. Tell me: Do you really want to be happy? In an age when we are constantly being enticed by vain and empty illusions of happiness, we risk settling for less and “thinking small” when it comes to the meaning of life. Think big instead! Open your hearts! As Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati once said, “To live without faith, to have no heritage to uphold, to fail to struggle constantly to defend the truth: this is not living. It is scraping by. We should never just scrape by, but really live” (Letter to I. Bonini, 27 February 1925). In his homily on the day of Piergiorgio Frassati’s beatification (20 May 1990), John Paul II called him “a man of the Beatitudes” (AAS 82 [1990], 1518).

If you are really open to the deepest aspirations of your hearts, you will realize that you possess an unquenchable thirst for happiness, and this will allow you to expose and reject the “low cost” offers and approaches all around you.

Message of Pope Francis for the twenty-ninth world Youth Day 2014



BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD

These are not the peace-loving people nor the “pacifists” nor the “pacificators: the “peacemakers” referred to in the Beatitude are an originality, a uniqueness of the Gospel. They can share long stretches of their journey with others but they come from farther away and go even farther.

For the Bible, peace is not a simple category which is single-coloured: it is polychromed, it is a symphony. Peace means having good relations with God, with others, with yourself, with the world; peace is benediction, it is salvation. Peace is happiness, it is the flourishing of human nature! It even has a social dimension: it is justice, freedom, dignity, it is the defence of the weak, the welcoming of strangers, the reconciliation with enemies. Biblical peace is a “world”, it opens out like a horizon, it is so vast and beautiful that only God can give it. And God gives “Shalom” through his Messiah (cf. Psalm 72; Is 11:19; 91:11), through Jesus. He is the peace between us (Ep 2:14)! He gives “His” peace, a peace quite different from that the world gives. (Jn 14:27).

If we want to understand the “peace” which Jesus speaks about, we have to learn it from Him, we have to receive it from Him.

Paul writes to the Christians of Ephesus that Jesus has brought peace about, “through the cross, in His own person He destroyed all hostility”(2:16).

Therefore, peace is the fruit of the cross: not of any cross, but of “His” Cross: of God’s cross! It is not the death of another innocent person which has changed history, nor is it another victim who “broken down the barrier” and generated “the new man” (2:14s). It is God’s death in His Son’s humanity, it is a death which gathers and embraces all deaths: the source of all sins, namely, the bitter streams of divisions, bullying, indifference, racial, religious and classist hatred. All death’s wide and desolate domain, in all its epochal forms and in its daily trifles, was reversed in Christ’s death and was overcome in His Resurrection. Thus Easter’s new, strong, and serene gift is “peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19-26).

In the time of Jesus, the “pax romana” prevailed and the Emperor Augustus had dedicated an altar (ara pacis augustae) to it. But that peace was the fruit of the “imperium”, of power, of Rome’s military dominion. It was a peace of prevalence, of abuse of power.

Christian peace is the fruit of the Cross: these are obviously quite opposite! For this reason, only those who are born to a new life are able to attain this “peace”. and the peacemakers, in its originality and in its full dimension, are only “the new men” who are risen with Christ. This does not exempt us from sharing this mission with the many fellow travellers, men and women of “good will”, pilgrims of peace like us. Rather it demands from us a greater effort.

The term used by Jesus “peacemakers” demands that we do not start with theories, thoughts or abstract theology but to dirty our hands: it urges us to put our hands in history’s dough, be it great or small, whether it concerns centuries of history or just daily occurrences, so as to follow and continually untangle the red thread of peace. We have to be realistic, tenacious, intelligent and trust the Lord to open the way for us and for all those with whom we share our journey.

But the peace that stems from the Cross makes us fully aware that peace, whose source is Love and whose fruit is Charity, can only be attained at a price: through fatigue and suffering, just like Jesus. The way towards peace is not a carpet of roses. Fighting hatred, divisions, indifference means fighting Evil. M.L. King wrote: “Evil is, by its very nature, persistent and rebellious, and never easily frees its prey without first offering quite a fanatical resistance. We should contest it continually by opposing it tenaciously using the strong weapon of Righteousness”. This is the way which the last Beatitude indicates to us.

“Because they shall be called the children of God”: this is how Jesus concludes this seventh Beatitude.

The expression “to be called” is a Jewish expression which means “becoming, being, becoming known as”.

Precisely, this is why the biblical “shalom” is a “world” of good which comes down to us from the Father and takes root in men’s hearts and in the furrows

of human history through the logic of the Cross. We could say that, with their life, with the humble and courageous tenacity of their actions and of their personal choices, “peacemakers” reflect the face of God down here. Just as He is revealed in the Cross of Jesus: a face full of mercy towards those who have distanced themselves, towards sinners, a face which fights the evil which traps and devastates, a face of tenderness towards the poor and the helpless.

The verb in the future tells us who “peacemakers are” so as to make us aware and understand the passing of time up to the final stage: they are the prophets of the future, the minstrels of hope. The Jewish tradition says that “peacemakers are the sons of the world to come” (Sifrà no. 6:26)

Thus, peacemakers help the earth not to forget heaven.



with Blessed Pier Giorgio

I think of the example of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. He said, “Jesus pays me a visit every morning in Holy Communion, and I return the visit in the meagre way I know how, visiting the poor”.

Pier Giorgio was a young man who understood what it means to have a merciful heart that responds to those most in need. He gave them far more than material goods.

He gave himself by giving his time, his words and his capacity to listen. He served the poor very quietly and unassumingly. He truly did what the Gospel tells us: “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret” (Mt 6:3-4). Imagine that, on the day before his death when he was gravely ill, he was giving directions on how his friends in need should be helped. At his funeral, his family and friends were stunned by the presence of so many poor people unknown to them. They had been befriended and helped by the young Pier Giorgio.

Message of Pope Francis for the twenty-ninth
World Youth Day 2016



BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. We will now reflect together on the eighth and ninth Beatitude, because they are meant to be taken as one concept, and the final part (“blessed are you when people insult you...”) explains and clarifies the first phrase (“blessed are the persecuted...”).

What is the “righteousness” for which one is persecuted? The word cannot be replaced very easily by certain “secular” terms used today: the same word “righteousness”, in the biblical world of 2000 years ago, does not have exactly the same meaning that it has today. Surely, the two terms could be very near in meaning and could lead to one another but they cannot precisely replace one another.

The “righteousness” which Matthew speaks about is accepting God’s will, God’s project, that is the person of Jesus and His Gospel, in one’s life. In fact, a little later Jesus speaks about “those who are persecuted because of Me” (5:11).

This means that those “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” are those who suffer because of the Kingdom, because of their faithfulness to the word of Jesus, because they have committed and dedicated their life to Him and remained faithful to Him at all cost.

The series of very accurate verbs with which Matthew specifies the persecution (“insults, false accusations, curses in v.11) indicates that He is describing the experience of His Church and of the Christian community for whom he is writing his Gospel. That precise “you” in the Beatitude (“blessed you...”), which comes before the subjects who attack and persecute (“insult you, persecute you...”) and are not clearly defined, indicates that the adhesion through faith to the person of Jesus, brought about a contrast

between the Christian community and the broader human context, culture and public opinion where it lives.

The evangelist returns more frequently than the others to this theme (5:44; 10:23; 13:31; 23:24).

It is a way of bringing the word and the life of Jesus close to what the Christian community was experiencing. It is the strength and the trust which comes from the Lord, but it is also a code, an alphabet which helps us interpret the difficulties, the fatigue, the suffering which one has to face to remain faithful to the Gospel. It is as if Matthew wants to tell the Church that persecution and difficulties are not a punishment, a fortuitous happening, a crazy fate. Rather these are a seal which guarantees its authenticity. They are a proof that they belong to the Lord, that they have submitted their lives to the logic of His Cross and His Resurrection. This suffering is not victimization, it is not contempt for life, it is a mysterious but real fruitfulness, a seed from which the future ear of corn will sprout.

Thus one can understand how under and in the meaning of this expression “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” one has to include so many pages written with blood in our times. I am thinking of Christian brothers who have been slaughtered, burnt, crucified because of their faith. I think of the suffering of millions of escaping refugees, at the mercy of discomfort and precariousness, in order to save their children’s and their own lives. And I think of our silence, our insensitivity, our superficial indifferences.

But I also think of all those who are deprived of their basic rights, exploited and rejected because of individual’s and peoples’ selfishness as well as because of the structural injustices of our systems, starting from the economic system.

So the Beatitude widens out to include also all those who involve themselves and work hard to increase the awareness of human dignity: in daily relations, in our small daily dealings as well as in the historical events of our times.

All this, according to the Bible, is actually “righteousness”, because it is doing the will of God, God’s project for man and his life.

The last Beatitude also says that the tears of those who are persecuted and the pain of those who work tenaciously for a more human world, as well as

the people's heart, are not wasted, are not only barren and hard ground. They are instead a casket which treasures and guards within it the gift of the Kingdom of God.

Thus the last Beatitude shows us the way and fills us with courage and hope in our journey towards the Kingdom.



with Blessed Pier Giorgio

Jesus teaches us to go the other way: “whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it” (Lk 9:24).

This means that we must not wait for favourable external circumstances to really get involved but that, on the contrary, only by committing our life — aware of losing it! — we create for others and for ourselves the conditions of new trust in the future. And here my thought goes spontaneously to a young man who truly spent his life this way, so much so as to become a model of trust and evangelical boldness for the young generations of Italy and of the world: Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati.

One of his mottos was: “Live, don’t just get by!”. This is the way to experience fully the strength and joy of the Gospel. In this way, not only will you find trust in the future, but you will succeed in generating hope among your friends and in the environments in which you live.

Meeting with children and young people
Pope Francis to Turin - 21 June 2015

PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI

Turin 6 April 1901 – 4 July 1925

Beatified 20 May 1990

Liturgical memory 4 July

He was born into a prominent family. Pier Giorgio lived a serene youth. He enrolled at the Politecnico in Turin. After a voyage in Germany, to the industrial Ruhr valley, he dreamt of devoting himself to miners. He thought that any profession is a service to our neighbour. He dedicated much of his time to works of social action and charity, he was active in the St. Vincent Society serving the sick and the poor. He joined the Society of the Catholic Youth.

In 1919 he joined the Fuci (Federation of Catholic Action Students in the University), then in 1920 the Popular Party. He lived the dimension of friendship to the utmost and founded the Company of the Tipi Loschi in order “to serve God in perfect joy”. The true link was faith and prayer.

He died owing to a sudden attack of polomyelitis.

John Paul II knew him since he was in Kracow and defined him as “the man of the eight Beatitudes”.

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