

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Practical Holiness: Living Beatitudes"



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Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs. The poor in spirit are those who are not possessed by possessions. Francis de Sales observes: "Our possessions are not our own. God has given them to us to cultivate and he wants us to make them fruitful and profitable. Hence, we perform an acceptable service by taking good care of them." (Intro III: 15) "Always keep your heart above riches; while it may be surrounded by riches your heart should remain apart from them and master over them...keep your heart above them and not allow your heart to rest in them." (Intro III: 14)

Blessed are the sorrowful; they shall find consolation. Healthy sorrow calls us to recognize our need for healing and forgiveness and helps us to share the plights of others. With regard to other people's plight, Francis de Sales writes: "Piety is a virtuous sorrow which comes into our hearts in order to make us desire to deliver our neighbor from the evil that he/she endures." (Treatise I: 5) With regard to ourselves, Francis adds: "Perfect penitence has two effects: sorrow that separates us from sin and love, which reconciles and reunites us with God." (Ibid, II: 20)

Blessed are the gentle; they shall have the earth for their possession. William Barclay suggests that gentleness might be understood as maintaining a balance between always being either totally outraged or perpetually passive about the relationships, circumstances and events of each day. It is about responding to life in ways that demonstrate profound respect and reverence for others. "How sweet is patience when compared with revenge; meekness, compared with anger and vexation; humility, when compared with arrogance and ambition." (IDL V: 11)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail; they shall be satisfied. How deeply do we want/desire righteousness? Of all the things about which/for which we hunger, how close to the top of the list is a desire to see right prevail? Those who have this desire may not necessarily see it come to fulfillment on this earth. Still, blessedness comes to the one who, in spite of failings and failures, still clings to the hunger and thirst for what is right and just. Francis insists: "I see you have a debt...never withhold from others anything that belongs to them." (Stopp)

Blessed are those who show mercy; mercy shall be shown to them. Mercy, empathy and sympathy are closely united. They enable us to get into the mind, heart, shoes or skin of another person. Such awareness enables us to practice forgiveness. But for Francis de Sales, mercy is not limited to forgiveness. God's greater mercy is synonymous with generosity. Francis writes: "God assists us to strive toward the life to which God calls us. In this way God shows us divine mercy, but not asking us to strive for something that is unobtainable." (Treatise I: 18) How generous is God? "God acts in our works, and we co-operate in God's action. God leaves for our part all the merit and profit of our services and good works; we leave God all the honor and praise thereof, acknowledging that the commencements, the progress, and the end of all the good we do depends on God's mercy...finishing what God had begun. O God, how merciful is God's goodness to us in thus distributing his bounty!" (Treatise XI: 6)

Blessed are the single-hearted; they shall see God. Being single-hearted challenges us to be less concerned about our own agenda and more devoted to the

will of God and the needs of others. Francis challenges us: "In the pursuit of virtue the less we consult our own interests, the more the purity of divine love shines from them." (Intro 4: 14) "God seeks to lead us to great purity of heart, renunciation of all self interest in what relates to God's service, and perfect self-denial." (Intro 4: 15) "If I approach and join myself to another for no other purpose than to be near that person...it is then an approach of pure and simple union." (Treatise VII :3)

Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called God's children. "We must in all things and everywhere live peacefully. If trouble, exterior or interior, comes upon us, we must receive it peacefully. If joy comes, we must receive it peacefully, without a throbbing heart. Have we to avoid evil, we must do so peacefully, without disquieting ourselves; otherwise, we may fall as we run away and give time to our enemy to kill us. If there peace to be done we must do that peacefully; otherwise we might commit many faults in our hurry. Even our repentance itself must be made peacefully..." (Letters to Religious)

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right; the Kingdom of heaven is theirs. We strive to make peace, but our efforts often create or invite its own trouble, resistance or hostility. "Christian doctrine has three principles upon which it grounds all its exercises: abnegation of self, which is far more than abstaining from pleasures; carrying the cross, which is far more than tolerating or sustaining it; and following our Lord, not only in renouncing our self and bearing our cross, but also in the practice of all sorts of good works. But at the same time there is not so much love shown in abnegation or in action as in suffering." (Treatise IX: 2)