

From The Pastor

As central as the Beatitudes are to the teaching of Jesus, I don't mind saying that I have not always found them easy to grasp. The Beatitudes are an essential part of the message of Jesus. He worked very hard to have the disciples, and the crowds understand the heart of God. The Beatitudes have been paralleled with the Ten Commandments as the new, kicked up version of moral living in love. This is not incorrect, yet it is incomplete in what might be understood as their deeper meaning.

I find the Beatitudes elusive, a little too 'soft' to get a concrete handle on. The Beatitudes are realized and understood from the inside of a person. The heart of the Beatitudes grow from the open heart of the believer who embraces them. A person doesn't choose to practice, or 'work on' one or the other of them. They grow in the heart of a person who matures in the heart of Jesus. To begin to realize what one beatitude means is to begin to recognize what they all mean.

We have reflected in recent weeks how Jesus, being born into our world, brought a new consciousness into the realm of human awareness. No longer limited to the awareness and desires of our base human nature, we are now able to stretch beyond ourselves toward a yearning for God that fires our hearts to love. If we are maturing in faith, we will more naturally live from the motives and desires of love, rather than from a sense of survival, self-preservation, or personal security and pleasures alone.

The Beatitudes call for a deeper awakening to God dwelling within us. We know these words and we use them often, but how deeply do we practically and functionally live as if they were real. It is very hard for us to not separate ourselves from God. We may believe quite sincerely that God lives within us, but when we pray, think, or talk about God we do so as if, I am here and God is there. We cannot help make at least some distinction that separates us from God.

The reality is that it is impossible for us to not be in union with God. You and I are always in union with God. Outside of God we cannot exist. Now, you might say, 'what about sin, doesn't that put me outside of God?' Yes, but no. When we sin, God is still God; we are still in God and God is still in us. Yet, the sin we commit and struggle with hinders our awareness, our perception, and realization of God within. When we sin God is not less God in us, we are less ourselves in God. We are less than what God calls us to be in his image. You may live in a beautiful house you love and value. It is yours, you live in it, and in a certain sense you could say the house lives in you in that you love it and it is some part of who you are. Your house is the same house when it is dirty and a mess, long neglected or ignored. It remains the beautiful house it is, but the beauty is hidden or obscured by the mess. That is what sin can do to our inner awareness of the presence of God. God remains present, but hidden under our 'mess'.

Here's another image: a fish is immersed in the waters of the sea. Is the fish aware of the water it lives in? You wouldn't say no, but is the fish consciously aware of the water? Are you and I conscious of the air we live in? Only when it smells, is filled with smoke, or absent. In some ways, God is like the water for the fish, and the air for us. We cannot live outside of God, and God cannot be outside of us, even though we may be unaware of his presence.

The Beatitudes call us to a maturing awareness of God's life within. Jesus is calling us to the Kingdom within, an interior Kingdom that is realized and lived from our hearts and souls. It is that place within us where God constantly dwells, inspiring our motivation for love, wholeness, justice, and peace.

To begin to realize the nature and quality of one of the Beatitudes is a maturing of the heart toward all of them. The heart is awakening and responding to the reality of God within. The first Beatitude can serve as an example for each of them. The essence is that of humility, realizing and accepting ones reality as it is. To be poor in spirit is to realize and admit that I am dependent on a larger reality than myself. I am dependent on the mercy and life of God within me as I admit the incompleteness of my human condition. Accepting my dependence on God and others, I can then mature into a yielding and surrendering to the love and mercy of God as I relate to the world and all those whom I personally encounter.

The opposite of this surrender and realization of dependence is the illusion of self-sufficiency. The wealthy and powerful will find such a suggestion distasteful, if not utterly absurd. This is why Jesus said, 'how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven.' God dwells within the rich, but the illusion of control and self-sufficiency obscures and hides the reality of God's presence.

Embrace the Beatitudes from within. Trust that God is *always* with you. Live from that place within that is motivated by and for love. Then you will understand the Beatitudes and mature in their wisdom and virtue.

Father John Esper