

Loving One Another

Second in a Series on the Ten Blessings

by the Rev. Michael Gladish

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

(Matthew 5:7-9)

Today we continue a series on the ten blessings, or beatitudes, from the gospel of Matthew. In Part I, we reviewed the first four blessings, all of which present an apparently contradictory appearance in the literal sense. Yet inwardly or spiritually, they help us to understand the Lord's incredible presence with us in our states of innocence and humility. Now we are ready to review the next three blessings, which appear beautifully positive even in the literal sense.

The Fifth Blessing

The word, mercy, in Scripture, means compassion, and involves feelings of pity for those who are in any sort of misery or need (*Arcana Coelestia* 3063, 5042, 6180, 9219, etc.). In particular it is said to be "love grieving" (*Arcana Coelestia* 5480), since it is a form of love, and love turns to grief for those who suffer, whether the suffering is self-inflicted or imposed by others, and whether it is natural or spiritual (as in the case of those who are in spiritual temptations).

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church says that the whole government of the Lord's Divine Providence is *nothing but mercy* because it is devoted entirely to lifting people out of their miserable selfish and worldly lives into the joys of heavenly life (see *Divine Providence* 337). This is work that the Lord must do with every one of us. It follows, then, that if we share His love, we will also share His mercy, and make every effort to co-operate with His work—in ourselves and in others. So we will feel His mercy operating in ourselves. We will feel pity, we will feel compassion, we will feel sorry for those in need.

But how can we be blessed in such feelings of sadness? Isn't this just like the question we raised last month about the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst, and those who are persecuted? Isn't it *painful* to be aware of other people's misery and distress? Think of anyone you love—wife or husband, son or daughter, mother or father, brother or sister, neighbor, friend—if you see that person hurt or sad, sick or disabled, confused, bitter, angry or abused, of course you are going to feel mercy toward that person, sadness for his or her pain. But the Lord said, "*Blessed* are the merciful...." Where, we might ask, is our blessing in this grief?

Well, first of all, when we reach out to others who are in need, we feel a sense of real use and purpose. We feel a sort of "call" from the Lord that signals His presence within us and possibly suggests a role for us. It makes us feel needed, that we have something we could share. Certainly, a cynic might say it makes us feel important or superior, and if we have an arrogant or conceited attitude that might be true. But if we have a humble and sincere attitude it just makes us feel good, and feeling good is feeling blessed.

Remember, also, that the Lord's Providence is nothing but pure mercy toward all of us. It is not His fault if we do not receive it. But if we open our hearts to others, His love flows in and fills us with a sense of blessing.

Finally, suppose we act on our feelings of mercy. With the Lord's help the people for whom we feel compassion will benefit and receive a blessing. The old man will smile or laugh; the confused or bitter friend will get some new insight and feel better; the sick or disabled will enjoy something she couldn't have done on her own; the abused or miserable person will feel understood. Since love carries with it the joy of making others happy, this too will be a blessing.

The Sixth Blessing

So it is with mercy. And so also it is with the blessing for the pure in heart. We know the heart corresponds to the will or love, but what is *purity* of heart? Where does love get its quality?

The answer is that love gets its quality from truth. To purify something is to wash or cleanse it, or in some cases to refine it so that it does not contain extraneous or contaminating elements. To have a pure heart, therefore, is to be sincere, to love without pretense or hypocrisy, and especially to love what is true, or to put it another way, to let the truth guide us in love.

In order to appreciate the blessing in this we have only to consider what it's like to *not* have a pure heart—that is, to be conflicted in our motives and intentions, not knowing which way to go or even how we really feel about things. We want to serve the Lord and the neighbor, but we also want to please ourselves, and so we vacillate from one attitude to another and from one course of action to another. Now we're happy and content, an hour later we're upset or angry; one day the world looks rosy, the next day it's a mess. And we can get ourselves into some very difficult situations by making decisions from good motives one day, and not so good another.

But for the person who has a pure heart—that is, a whole heart and singleness of purpose in following the Lord—life is relatively simple. It's not easy; no one ever said life would be easy, but it is more straightforward. Such a person loves the truth because it is the truth, and so he receives the truth more easily than others, and understands it. Therefore the Lord says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To "see God" is to understand how He works; it is to "see" His truth.

The Seventh Blessing

Notice that in blessing the merciful the Lord promised happiness to those in real charity or love for others. In blessing the pure in heart, He promised understanding to those who love the truth and try sincerely to live according to it. In the third blessing of this series—the seventh blessing overall—He promises happiness to the peacemakers, and peacemakers are those who work to combine their love and wisdom together in the uses of life so that there can be spiritual rest.

The Heavenly Doctrine has a great deal to say about peace, as does the Word of the Old and New Testaments. But the essential truth in all the passages is that peace comes to those who do what the Lord teaches. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21). Therefore

to “make peace” is to make the effort to combine the forces of love and wisdom we receive from the Lord to do what is right in our external lives.

The person who really cares about others, who seeks to understand the truth so that he may actually help others, the achievement of this goal is a blessing in itself. So the Lord said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” For they enjoy this work and take great delight in any contribution they can make toward establishing the order of heaven on earth. But beyond this blessing, they are also called “sons of God” because they are “reborn” or regenerated through a life lived according to His truth. They feel His closeness the way children feel the closeness of a loving father.

The Blessings in Context

When the Lord blessed the merciful and the pure in heart, or rather, when He said that they *are* blessed, He was referring to an Old Testament teaching from Psalm 18, where David wrote of the Lord,

*With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful;
With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless;
With the pure You will show Yourself pure* (v 25-27; see also 2 Samuel 22:26-28).

In fact, all of the ten blessings are reiterations of Old Testament teachings. As the Lord said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). So in this first part of the sermon on the mount—the blessings—He states the laws of order, and in the parts that follow He *explains* them and gives examples of what they really mean. For instance, what is it to be truly merciful? Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbors and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven...” (Matthew 5:43-45). So He showed that mercy involves an inner disposition of kindness toward all people, no matter how they may be disposed toward us.

Again, the Lord said “Blessed are the pure in heart.” Later in the sermon, He said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). So He taught that it is not enough to love and honor the commandments in outward life, it is also necessary to love and honor them in will, desire, and intention—in our hearts.

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 5:1-12; Psalm 37:1-11; *Arcana Coelestia* 3063; *Divine Providence* 337

The second and third sermons in this series were originally written as one piece.