

The Beatitudes

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Beatitudes can be viewed as a single system a ladder ascending in virtues. Christ calls us first of all to acquire spiritual poverty, and meekness, and only then to rise step by step to the summit of spiritual perfection. Man becomes aware of his poverty of spirit from the moment when the summoning and illumining grace takes effect within him. The first thing revealed to the spiritual infant is his helplessness the incompatibility of his present spiritual state with that to which he is being summoned. The human spirit is the chief motivating force of our salvation, for we are bound to God, not by the soul, but by the spirit, and it is not through the soul, but through the spirit that God's good will descends upon us.

It is in the spirit of man that the Image of God is most truly reflected. Our spirit trembles before God when it establishes contact with Him in prayer, meditation, reading the Word of God, in the Sacraments, Divine Services, good deeds, and so on. Only when it is humbled will our spirit become aware of the gulf which separates man from God and will know that God is all that within ourselves is nothing worthy of the Lord or pleasing to Him, nothing that is our own except our sins and that the fullness of spiritual life consists in renunciation of self in giving oneself entirely to God and to others.

Only by sacrificing ourselves will we find ourselves in the fullness of life lived for God and for others. And to find ourselves in God and in others, we must lose our own selves. Our spirit, renewed in God, knows that human life belongs to Him and always and in all things is dependent upon Him, and that we must be in steadfast contact with Him, begging His help and living in the hope that the gracious Lord in His mercy will not abandon us in our helplessness.

The righteous men of the Old Testament were aware of their insignificance before God. As Abraham said of himself, I... am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27). David, both king and prophet, cried out, I am a worm, and no man (Ps. 22:6); I am poor and needy (Ps. 86:1). Moses said to the Lord, I am slow of speech and of tongue (Ex. 4:10); and the Prophet Isaiah said to himself, I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips (Is. 6:5).

The saints of the New Testament Church, the nearer they drew to God, the stronger they were aware of their smallness and unworthiness before God, and were filled with truly profound humility. Some of them declared as they died that they had not even begun their salvation, while others declared that there was no place for them even in Hell, while yet others declared that even the earth would not accept their sinful bodies.

According to St. John Chrysostom, humility is the foundation of all virtue, for even if one distinguishes himself by fasting, prayer, alms, chastity, of any other virtue, without humility all of these would be destroyed and would perish. Thus there is no salvation without humility. This virtue was regarded highly in the Old Testament, for as the Psalmist says, A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise (Ps. 51:17). Seeing the results which humility brings, he was moved to say, When I was brought low, He saved me (Ps. 116:6).

In the New Testament, the Lord Himself gave us the greatest example of humility (Matt. 11:39; John 13:14-16), for His entire life teaches us humility. The Mother of God says of herself, For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden (Luke 1:48). The Apostle Paul said of himself, I am the foremost among sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). The Publican of the Gospel saw nothing within himself except sinfulness, and simply hoped in God's mercy.

The ways in which one attains humility are different. Sometimes it is through sickness, sorrow and misfortunes. Sometimes it is through being persecuted by others or oppressed by disease. As St. John Chrysostom says, True humility comes when we turn from our sins to God.

In the human soul, humility is countered by pride which struggles ceaselessly with it trying to destroy it. We know that all the evils which bring man to damnation are the results of pride: the Fall of Satan, of Adam, of Cain, and so on. And to this day pride is the chief enemy of humility, and overcoming it with God's help is the first task to be undertaken for our salvation, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

The attainment of humility is linked with overcoming our own self and pride, and with the victory over our passions and the temptations which face us. True humility prevents us from passing judgment, from envying, being angry, arousing anger in others, hurting or rebuking them, and it enables us to help others, to pray for all, and to bear everything that happens to us calmly as coming from God. He who has attained deep humility considers himself the unworthiest among men and attributes all his accomplishments to God.

Christian humility is free and highly fruitful, and there is not the least servitude, ingratiating or flattery in it. The humble Christian cannot be the servant of other men, because then he would not be the servant of Christ, for the servant of Christ is free in Christ as the Highest Truth. Love for Christ and devotion to Him allow the believer to call himself the servant of Christ, and as a result of his regeneration, he is a freeborn son, a child of God and not a slave.

Therefore, the poor in spirit, those who are humble of heart, will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. This kingdom, as the Lord Himself says, is within you (Luke 17:21), in the spirit and in the humble heart.

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Sorrow and grief enter the soul of one who has attained poverty of spirit and who has become aware of the power of sin over his soul, and they wring an involuntary cry of grief from its very depths. Therefore the Savior is anxious to comfort those who weep with His second Beatitude.

When it lived in Paradise, the human soul knew neither weeping, nor tears, for then man was with God and God was with man. The sin of our first parents separated man from God, giving rise to godly tears and sorrow which lead to contrition and salvation. This godly sorrow, as St. John of the Ladder tells us, liberates the soul from all earthly loves and affections. This sadness, however, should not be confused with worldly grief [which] produces death (2 Cor. 7:10). If we do not overcome it, this earthly sorrow may grow into the mortal sin of depression and despair.

Godly sorrow is permeated with love for God and for others and sorrow for their sins and for our own. Such was the sorrow of Moses when, at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Israelites forgot their God and made themselves a golden calf to worship. Such were the tears shed by the Prophet Jeremiah over the ruins of Jerusalem. And such were the tears of the Savior Himself when He foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter wept bitterly after his denial of our Lord, but the Lord comforted him when He appeared to him on the first day after His Resurrection, for God's mercy is infinite and He not only comforts those who repent in this earthly life, but will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:17).

Mourning, as the expression of the spirit's repentance for its sins, is of spiritual value, and must be treasured so as not to be wasted on earthly vanities. The mourning of the spirit, however, is not always accompanied by physical tears, for deep sorrow can be expressed in sighs, constriction of the heart, profound silence, inner concentration and withdrawal. Yet, as St. Ephraim the Syrian notes, these tears are like precious pearls, for by God's gift the soul is enlightened by tears, reflecting the heavenly like a mirror.

Great is the strength of pure and heartfelt tears that rise from the depths of the heart, for these tears wash away all internal and external filth and quench the flame of all irritability and anger. These tears are especially saving when they are constant and, as St. John of the Ladder teaches us, he who is truly concerned for his salvation will count each day when he has not wept for his sins as wasted, in spite of any good deeds that may have been accomplished.

We are constantly sinning, both when we are active and when we give ourselves over to idle dreams, and these sins must be washed away with tears of repentance. These tears are a means of washing and purifying our soul, and a sacrifice offered up to God by our contrite and broken spirit. If our tears arise from fear of God for our sinfulness, they will intercede for us with God, as St. Ephraim tells us.

The blessed receive a special gift from God: tenderness and the tears of tenderness, which show that godly tears and sorrow contain both joy and gaiety, just as the comb contains the honey. In addition, there are the tears of the heart, which are better than the tears of the eyes, as Bishop Theophan the Recluse wrote. The tears of the eyes fatten the worm of vanity, while the tears of the heart are to be seen by God alone. Tears during prayer at Church and at home are beneficial, but in Church it is better to hide one's tears, leaving merely the tearful mood in one's heart, that is to say, a contrite spirit and a contrite heart. Night is the best time for prayer, especially at midnight. That is the place for your tears. Therefore, secret tears for our sins cleanse the soul and bring it closer to God, bringing us both comfort in this life and true consolation in the next.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Meekness is directly linked with heartfelt repentance and mourning for our sins and he who considers himself worthy of all sorrows and troubles will be filled with the spirit of meekness and humility. He who is meek offends

no one, is angered by no one, is modest and virtuous. He is a stranger to idle curiosity and never refuses his help to those who are suffering, doing good quietly and without notice. This virtue is as difficult to attain as it is great, for it demands much effort and struggle within the one who wishes to attain it. First he must overcome his irritability, impatience, touchiness and irascibility, for by overcoming his passions, he attains modesty and meekness. This, however, is only the beginning of his growth in this virtue.

The Psalmist especially praises meekness, placing it on a level with truth and righteousness (Ps. 45:4), and the Prophet Isaiah speaks of God's particularly merciful attitude to man who is meek: This is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word, says the Lord (Is. 66:2). St. Peter sees a meek and quiet spirit as one of the greatest treasures of the human heart, which in God's sight is very precious (1 Pet. 3:4). Therefore he urges the followers of Christ to be ready to answer with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15) those who ask the reason for their hope. St. James asks us to receive with meekness the Word of God (James 1:21), so that it will find the most direct way to the hearts of his listeners.

St. Paul pays special attention to meekness, pointing out that meekness in the preacher is the best way of convincing those who oppose him (2 Tim. 2:24-25) or for correcting the sinner (Gal. 6:1). He begs the Ephesians to treat each other with all lowliness and meekness, because these are the qualities that make a man worthy of the calling to which [he has] been called (Eph. 4:2, 1). To the rebellious Corinthians, he would come not with a rod, but with love, in a spirit of gentleness, (1 Cor. 4:21), for this Apostle to the Gentiles counts meekness among the fruits of the spirit, for against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23).

In the Old Testament King David (the Psalmist), the Prophet Moses, who is called very meek (Num. 12:3), and also the righteous Job, who blessed the Name of God when subjected to severe trials, were all distinguished by their meekness. In the New Testament the Savior demonstrated the greatest meekness and called us to learn from Him first and foremost this virtue: Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matt. 11:29), for it is out of this virtue that all the other virtues grow, including love itself. Through meekness and humility man overcomes his natural self and pride, and spiritually develops towards self-denial in the Name of God and out of love of Him and one's neighbor.

The saints offer us marvelous examples of meekness. Once during Divine Liturgy, St. John the Almsgiver, when he was Patriarch, reading in the Gospel lesson about making peace with your brother before coming to pray (Matt. 5:23-24), recalled that there was a cleric whom he had punished for some misdeed and who was angry with him. He called him immediately and, falling at his feet, begged him to forgive him and to make peace. St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, while in a conversation with a local landowner, was in the course of an argument struck in the face by him, at which the saint fell down on his knees and humbly asked forgiveness of the landowner, saying, For God's sake, forgive me for bringing you to such a state. Only a man of meek spirit could have answered thus.

We can help pave the way to meekness in ourselves by deciding to strive for spiritual health in all things, and for abstinence in our designs, in thought, in word and in deed. As St. John Chrysostom says, If we are opposed, we will be humble. If anyone is arrogant with us, we will be helpful. If anyone torments or oppresses us by making fun of us or swearing at us, we will not answer in kind, so as not to destroy ourselves through vengeance.

The Lord promises those who attain meekness that they will inherit the earth. One would have expected the meek, the most defenseless and oppressed of all, to perish in the first centuries of the Christian era at the hands of the infuriated pagans, but they have indeed inherited the earth that was formerly ruled by those who persecuted them. The meek will receive their spiritual inheritance in the mansions of the righteous, and will receive the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Ps. 27:13), where eternal blessedness awaits them.

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

The more profoundly we become aware of our sinfulness and spiritual imperfection, the less bearable to our reason and our conscience becomes the idea of being spiritually extinguished the threat of losing our salvation and within our soul are born hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. Just as in life the body periodically hungers for food and thirsts for drink, so in the spiritual life come moments when man yearns for spiritual food.

The good news of the gospel is the Truth that the Savior has come to earth, and His teaching the righteousness of our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This good news of the Truth of Christ enlightens the soul. The Truth of Christ leads to faith in the true righteousness of our salvation. And the stronger the faith in this righteousness, the more fully its depths are revealed to the soul possessing it wholly, acting from faith to faith, urging it to lead a life compatible with this righteousness.-

If the meaning of the Truth of Christ lies in the fact that it brings spiritual enlightenment to those who believe, then the significance of this righteousness lies in the fact that it leads them to faith and justifies them. God's righteousness in all its fullness is centered in God alone and from Him it is poured forth on all who seek it. To live in righteousness means to live according to the will of God, and to live according to the will of God means to live in God's righteousness.

It is not those who thirst for worldly happiness that are blessed, but those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, obeying Christ's commandments, living in God and with God. He who fulfils the will of God will be like the Savior, Who said: My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, and to accomplish His work (John 4:34).

The will of God is revealed to us in Holy Scripture. However, it is not enough to know the truth of our salvation, for we also need the strength to carry it out, which we receive through the Sacraments and the prayers of the Church. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the food and drink of which Christ said: I am the bread of life.... For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed (John 6:35, 55).

Hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, which find their highest satisfaction in the prayers and Sacraments of the Church (especially in Holy Communion), act together with love and the other virtues in man's heart. However, we will be completely and entirely satisfied with God's righteousness only in the life to come, when the righteous will neither hunger nor thirst and He Who sits upon the throne will shelter them with His presence (Rev. 7:15).

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Everyone who lives in society needs a kind word, sympathy, and compassion, and the man of warmth and sympathy has the traits of mercy. The merciful, whom the Gospel calls charitable, are first and foremost spiritual people hearers of the spirit. Mercy is a gift or the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The merciful follow Christ's commandments: they give meat to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, they clothe the naked, they take in the stranger and comfort the sorrowing (Matt. 25:31-46).

The charitable look after orphans, do not forget the aged, return to the path of truth those who have lost their way, strengthen those whose faith is wavering, teach others kindness, give advice, do not answer evil with evil, and forgive offenses. They pray for their fellow men, and especially they pray for the dead who need nothing from the living except prayers and deeds of kindness in their memory.

The Lord warned Cain: ...if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it (Gen. 4:7). Doing good constantly is the guarantee of a successful struggle with sin. Those who are constantly charitable and merciful will receive mercy in their turn both from God and from good fellow men. But let the hardhearted bear in mind that judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy (James 2:13). The Savior points to His Heavenly Father as the highest example of mercy and calls us to emulate Him (Luke 6:36), for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:45).

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Savior also teaches us how to perform deeds of mercy: Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father Who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do.... But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... (Matt. 6:1-3). To do deeds of kindness with the aim of being praised by others, will be the means of depriving oneself of the rewards of our Heavenly Father, for God Who sees in secret will reward you (Matt. 6:4).

Around us are people who need our sympathy. They are the Lazaruses of our lives (Luke 16:14-31 the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus), who will open or close for us the gates of God's Kingdom, depending upon how we have treated them. And all those who are charitable and merciful on earth in the Name of God will find mercy in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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

It would seem that there is nothing harder to attain than purity of heart and nothing more impossible than to see God. For, is it possible for our heart to be pure and spotless when out of it come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander (Matt. 15:19), or for us to see God Whom no man has ever seen or can

see (1 Tim. 6:16; John 1:18; 1 John 4:12)? Nevertheless, the Savior speaks of purity of heart and of seeing God with the heart, because the previous Beatitudes teach the Christian humility, mourning, meekness, righteousness and mercy; for only the spirit which has acquired these virtues will give a new fruit grace-endowed purity of heart and radiant holiness that sees God from within.

The pure in heart are not tempted by the seductions of this world. As St. John of the Ladder says, truly blessed is he who has attained complete dispassion for all carnal things, for appearance and beauty; great is he who is dispassionate; he who has triumphed over the body, has triumphed over nature, and there is no doubt that he who has triumphed over nature stands higher than nature, and such a man differs little from the-Angels; purity of heart brings us closer to God and, as far as possible, makes us like unto Him.

St. Ephraim the Syrian teaches that purity of heart hates luxury, laziness, bodily beauty, fine garments, rich food and drunkenness. It overcomes the flesh and penetrates the heavenly with its eye. It is the fountainhead of love and the dwelling place of Angels. It is a gift of God, filled with goodness, edification and knowledge. It is a peaceful and fitting haven which fends off evil and cleaves to goodness. This purity of heart is characterized by cleanliness of body and soul, a peaceful nature, meekness, humility, love and closeness to God, and attainment in all the virtues, including strict abstinence.

The heart attains purity, says St. Ephraim the Syrian, through numerous tribulations, privations, renunciation of all worldly things and mortification. And if it attains purity, it is not defiled by minor offenses, fears neither tribulations in any part of the soul, because the soul is strengthened by God.

The struggle with impure thoughts that defile our heart and conscience helps us to attain purity of heart. Remaining in constant prayerfulness before God creates a living link with God, giving rise to what is called the awareness of God in the soul, the awareness of Christ our Savior, and His cross, and it conquers our bad thoughts, evil designs and desires of the heart. And this awareness of God, on the highest levels of spiritual attainment, becomes the grace-giving vision of God.

The performance of charitable deeds fills with love the heart of the ascetic. Contemplating God, reading the Holy Scriptures, the works of the Holy Fathers and the Lives of the saints, attending Divine Services as often as possible, and partaking of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion, are all spiritual and saving fare for the heart.

The ascetic whose heart has been purified and sanctified by the Holy Spirit is filled with love for Christ and enters into such a close spiritual union with the Lord that it is as though he sees Him in himself. Freed from the influence of their passions, the saints also see God in Divine Revelation. Just as a mirror reflects an image when it is clean, so can a pure and holy soul see God and understand the Scriptures, says the Blessed Theophilact. Like the other Beatitudes which begin on earth and are completed in Heaven, seeing God when it begins on earth is but seeing through a glass, darkly what in the next life we shall see face to face (1 Cor. 13:12).

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

The fall of our first parents, which led to the severing of the grace-endowing link with God and changed their souls radically, could not but affect the relations between them as well. Disorder and conflict within men brought about their mutual alienation. But because our God is Peace and Love, salvation was impossible without reconciliation with God. As St. Paul says, in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross (Col. 1:19-20). And Christ fulfilled the will of His Father. He came, accomplished the Sacrifice of Redemption and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near (Eph. 2:17). And to this day He bestows peace upon us, for He said: Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you (John 14:27). And not only does He bestow peace, but He Himself has become our peace (Eph. 2:14).

Christ founded upon earth the Kingdom of God, one of the most essential features of which is its peace. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Peace in the Kingdom of God is the peace of God, which passes all understanding, [which] will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

St. Paul summons all believers to seek peace in God (Rom. 15:33; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20-21). When, with God's help, inner peace is established in the human heart, the link between this heart and others is also

established. It is expressed in unity of word, spirit and thought. / appeal to you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). Agreement and unanimity make for lasting peace in human relations, for where they are found, the individual is like the whole and the whole is like the individual. Such peace must be sought and striven for (1 Pet. 3:11), and cherished with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

The Savior Himself was particularly insistent upon the need for peace among men. If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; and first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser...lest your accuser hand you over to the judge...and you be put in prison (Matt. 5:23-25). The Savior said further: If any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Matt. 5:40-41). The main thing here is that there should be no quarrel on the way and that the inner link not be broken.

The Holy Fathers teach that humility is the foundation of all virtues, and helps us to attain spiritual peace. According to St. Isaac the Syrian, it is when peace reigns in your life and when your soul is obedient to you, and the rest of you along with it, that the peace of God is born in your heart. According to St. Ephraim the Syrian, if your brother disagrees with what you say, do not be angry, but renounce your own will for the sake of love and peace.

The Son of God came down to earth in order to reconcile to Himself all things (Col. 1:20). He Himself, the Only-Begotten Son of God, is the great Peacemaker The Prince of Peace, as the Prophet Isaiah calls Him. Blessed are the peacemakers who keep their conscience at peace with God and with their fellow men, following the example of our Savior the Peacemaker. According to the words of the Lord, they shall be called the sons of God.

8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

In His Sermon on the Mount, the Savior pointed out the two paths through life the wide and broad one, and the strait and narrow one. The wide one leads to perdition, and there are many who choose this path, while the narrow way leads to life, that is, it brings salvation (Matt. 7:13-14).

The narrow way demands an effort a constant spiritual struggle with sin and with all the obstacles which are to be met with on the way. The flesh, our bodily nature, revolts against this way, for it finds our efforts towards purity of body and of heart hard to endure, and the enemy of mankind, who cannot bear man's movements towards salvation, revolts along with ill-intentioned men, who take the good life of the believer as a rebuke to themselves.

History remembers many who have persecuted God's righteous ones. The first was Cain, who killed his brother Abel because of the latter's piety. The wild Esau cast forth his meek brother Jacob, and the sons of Jacob cast out their brother Joseph and sold him into slavery in Egypt to get him out of their way. The unfortunate King Saul oppressed the meek David. The Jews drove away the prophets who condemned their lawless life, and persecuted and crucified our Lord Jesus Christ. This persecution of the faithful came about, as the Savior shows us, for righteousness' sake (Matt. 5:10).

The true believer answers enmity and opposition with goodwill. He answers lies and slanders with patience and silence, following the rule that we should turn away from evil and do good (Ps. 34:14; Rom. 12:9). St. Paul teaches us: Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all (Rom. 12:17), including the ill-intentioned, in order to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21).

The Savior speaks even more concretely and decisively: If any one strikes you on the right cheek., turn to him the other also (Matt. 5:39), by which means you will morally disarm him. It is better to suffer pain and humiliation than to subject him who has hurt you to evil in return, for evil breeds only evil. Only good can breed good. The best defense from persecution, therefore, is patience and prayer for those who persecute you. That is how the Savior Himself prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34) and how St. Stephen the First Martyr and Archdeacon prayed for those who stoned him (Acts 7:60).

We know that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). The words of the Savior, though, are heartening and comforting: If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you (John 15:20). The destiny of the Christian, then, is to live in sorrow and take the narrow way. However, love of truth, constancy and

determination in virtue, courage and patience help us to bear suffering. It is not enough to know righteousness; we must also love it. And it is this love which gives rise to our determination, courage and patience.

All the previous Beatitudes, by producing corresponding virtues in the heart of the Christian, prepare him for active love of Christ's righteousness, and for spiritual life in Christ which gives us strength to bear the sorrows, tribulations and persecutions that come our way. And the reward for longsuffering is the Kingdom of God, which every man who loves God's righteousness starts to bear within himself here on earth, and in full measure in the Kingdom of Heaven.

9. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake.

10. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.

These words are the continuation and conclusion and at the same time the crown of all the Beatitudes that have preceded. In the eighth Beatitude, oppression and persecution were linked with Christ's righteousness, and in the ninth, with Christ Himself as the bearer and expression of this righteousness. The Savior declares in no uncertain terms that men shall persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. In this lies the greatest reward for His followers, who are called to joy and happiness, when the hour of suffering is upon them.

It is hard for the non-Christian to understand how one can rejoice and be happy when oppressed, cursed and persecuted. It seems to him that all suffering leads naturally only to sorrow. But let us recall the path we have trodden, up every step of the ladder of the Beatitudes. As St. John Chrysostom says: Note after how many Beatitudes Christ offers us this last one. In this last He wished to show that he who has not been prepared by all the other Beatitudes cannot undertake the feat of bearing suffering, revilement and persecution for Christ's sake. For this reason, in laying the way from the first Beatitude to the last, Christ was forging a golden chain for us. It starts with the fact that the poor in spirit, the man of humility, will mourn for his sins and in this way will become meek, righteous and merciful. And the merciful is bound to become pure in heart. The pure in heart will be a peacemaker. And he who has attained all this will be ready for danger, and will not be afraid of calumny and countless tribulations. Readiness and fearlessness will be the crowning virtues that bring, according to Jesus Christ, joy and happiness.

It is, of course, natural for man to avoid suffering, for through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Tribulations are unavoidable as an accompaniment to this life. The Savior said: In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33). The Lord overcame the world by treading the path of persecution by His enemies, the path of torture and suffering in Gethsemane, at Pilate's judgment and on Golgotha. Sinless and innocent, He accomplished His feat for our sake and for us, to free man from the stain of sin, to bring him closer to Himself and make his path through life more like the way of the cross which He Himself had followed. He calls him to take up his cross and follow Me (Matt. 16:24), for he who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:38), and cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:27).

It is important to understand that tribulations are necessary because there is no other way for us to be cleansed of our sins except that pointed out by the Savior and followed by Him. In suffering we become aware of our own weakness and helplessness, and, humbled in prayer and contrition before God, we receive divine help and joy in the Lord.

Tenderness of heart and spiritual joy are characteristic of the spiritual life. If life itself is a thing of goodness and joy, then life in God is doubly good and doubly joyous. The very fact that Christ is preached brings joy (Phil. 1:18). When we behold God's world with a pure eye or pray sincerely, or do good willingly, or perform the current act of obedience in the awareness that we are fulfilling our duty, then a quiet joy in the Lord descends in our heart. As St. James instructs us: Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness (James 1:2-3).

Joy is no less a fruit of the spirit than love, peace, meekness and the other virtues (Gal. 5:22). Joy carries within it hope in God's continuing mercy. This joy and hope helped those who performed spiritual deeds for Christ to bear their sufferings, and gave them confidence that the Lord would not send them more suffering than they could bear, but would grant them consolation in its turn. And the lives of the holy martyrs confirm this.

Amidst a severe test of affliction joy abounds, granted by God's grace (2 Cor. 8:2). It is not surprising that the

Apostle calls us to rejoice always (1 Thess. 5:16). The Lord promises that no one will take your joy from you (John 16:22). If even here in our earthly life the Lord gives us joy, how great must be the joy that awaits us in Heaven!

The Christian who accepts the Gospel call to his neighbor is like the wise man who built his house on the rock (Matt. 7:25), and he will fear no misfortunes. For all believers this rock is our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), urging us to follow Him, practice the Christian virtues and fulfill His commandment.

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