

The Beatitudes

Introduction

Beatitudes are placed right at the beginning of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ to emphasize the importance of its contents as being very central to Christian living. They reveal to us the ethical standards of the Kingdom. The word beatitude originates from the Latin word, ‘beatus’, which carries the meaning to be happy or to be blissful.

The Setting:

“When he saw the *crowds*, he went up the *mountain*, and after he had *sat down*, his *disciples* came to him. He began *to teach* them, saying:” (Mt 5:1-2).

Crowds vs Disciples:

Crowds (ὄχλος) run to see or hear (Mt. 13:2; Mk. 3:20; 9:25; Lk. 5:1), receive or seek (Lk. 8:40; Jn. 12:9) and accompany (Mt. 21:9; Jn. 12:17) Jesus. Disciple is the English translation of the Greek word ‘μαθητής’ which can also be translated as “learner,” “pupil,” or “student.” Jesus was directly teaching and interacting with the disciples while the multitude listened in on the conversation.

Mountain:

Mountains and hills are mentioned more than 500 times in Scripture. Mountains are “closer to God” who dwells in the heavens. As a result, God often reveals himself on a mountaintop (Ex 3: 1- 6; 24: 12); (Mt 17: 1–8; Mk 9: 2–8). One of the ways that Matthew presents Jesus is as a kind of “new Moses.” So, just as Moses taught the people of Israel from the mountain after he had received the law, so Jesus begins his ministry by going up a mountain and teaching his disciples.

The mountain provided separation for Jesus from the multitude. Jesus ascends the mountain to summon the 12 disciples (Lk 3:13) and among many other instances Jesus ascends the mountain to spend time alone with the Father in prayer (Lk 6:12).

<i>10 Commandments</i>	<i>8 Beatitudes</i>
Opening to OT’s 613 commandments	Opening to Jesus’ teachings
Mountaintop delivery	Mountainside delivery
God to Moses; Moses to people	Jesus to disciples & crowd
All but 2 are negatives: “You shall not ...”	Positive motivators: “Blessed are ...”
Covenant promises:	Land and People Promise of God’s Kingdom

He sat down and began to teach:

Sitting is a position of teaching (Ex 18:13); (Mt 23:2); (Lk 4:20). Based on other instances in Scripture when Jesus sat down (Mt. 13:2, Mk 4:1, Lk 5:3, Jn 6:3) it becomes clear that sitting down, especially when Jesus separated Himself from the multitudes was a cue to his disciples that He was going to teach. It is worth mentioning that when the pope speaks ‘ex cathedra,’ (Chair of Peter), it means that he is speaking with all the authority of his position.

Blessed:

From the Hebrew origin, forms related to the theme of ‘Blessed’ are ‘brk’ to bless; ‘baruk’ blessed; and ‘beraka’ the blessing. ‘Asher’ means ‘the blissful state of the soul in the world to come.’ The main connotation is to relate these words and their meanings to the presence or accessibility of God.

In Greek the term ‘blessed’ (μακάριος) referred to the gods who transcended above the sufferings of this world. Then it was used for deceased persons who shared in the supra-earthly existence of gods in the isle of the blessed. Eventually it was used to the elite and the wealthy who were able to be above the normal cares and worries of the poorer people.

When ‘makarios’ was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it took on another meaning. It referred to the results of right living or righteousness. Being blessed meant you received earthly, material things: a good wife, many children, abundant crops, riches, honor, wisdom, beauty, good health, etc. It is Yahweh who bestows earthly blessings upon persons. The recipients of those divine blessings are characterized as “blessed/happy.” At his very core, a person who is blessed is undergoing a spiritual change unlike anything this world has to offer.

Structure:

Literal Translation from Greek

5:3 Poor in spirit blessed because theirs is the kingdom of heaven

5:4 Mourners blessed because they will be comforted

5:5 Meek blessed because they will inherit the earth

5:6 Hungry blessed because they will be filled

5:7 Merciful blessed because they will be mercied

5:8 Pure blessed because they will see God

5:9 Peacemakers blessed because they will be called sons of God

5:10 Persecuted blessed because theirs is the kingdom of heaven

In Greek:

5:3 Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

5:4 μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

Each beatitude is composed of a statement of *who* is blessed followed by a statement of *why* the person is blessed. The idea of the blessedness of the present possession of the kingdom (5:3, 10) is developed primarily by stressing what God will do for disciples (future divine passive verbs; 5:4, 6, 7, 9), and secondarily by what disciples will do in response to what God does (future active and middle verbs; 5:5, 8).

Another way of outlining the text can be as follows: Promise of eschatological reversals to the unfortunate (5:3-6); promises of eschatological rewards to the virtuous (5:7-10).

Conclusion:

Catholicism has interpreted the Beatitudes as perfectionistic, meaning that it is seen as ‘the perfect sermon’ that will produce ‘the perfect life’.

The Beatitudes are probably the most important, subversive, and revolutionary text in the Bible. In order to follow Jesus and live the Christian life we need to enter into the challenging world of the Beatitudes

Pope Francis says, “The Beatitudes are the portrait of Jesus, his way of life; and they are the path to true happiness, which we too can travel with the grace that Jesus gives us.”

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

The Verses:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:3)

“Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.” (Lk 6:20)

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” (Lk 6:24)

Poor:

In early Christianity we find at least three different explanations by the fathers of the Church:

- Material poverty that deserves a reward, which is beatitude;
- Intellectual poverty of persons destitute of variable intelligence and wisdom; and
- Spiritual poverty meaning humility and modesty.

Modern commentators are also divided in their opinions:

- Renunciation of material wealth is rewarded with a beatitude;
- The feeling of how inadequate and limited is human wisdom and intelligence;
- Poor are the oppressed because of their pious life; and
- One's lack of good will, or virtue, or faithfulness, and so on.

The Greek word ‘ptoxos’ (πτωχος) is used 34 times in the New Testament, meaning one who is bent or folded over, crouching and cowering as one utterly destitute and helpless, living by begging for alms. Luke uses this word in the Sermon on the plains (Lk 6: 20-26). Penes (Πέννης) (2 Cor 9:9) and penechros (πενεχρος) (Lk 21:2) are used once each in the New Testament to denote the poor.

Anavim of Yahweh:

In the Old Testament there are repeated references to the ‘Anavim,’ people whose economic distress left them with nothing to rely upon except God (Lev 19:9-15, 32-33; Deu 15:4, 7, 11; Ps 37:10-17; Prov 16:18-19; Isa 66:1-2; Jer 22:15-17; Amos 2:6-8). Their distress was due to such problems as death in the family, physical handicap, advancing age, military defeat, social injustice, or alien status.

Poor in spirit: πτωχοί τω πνεύματι is used by Matthew in the Sermon on the mount.

***Miskaneh* (poor):**

This Aramaic word is an idiom for one who voluntarily gives up all material things for a spiritual benefit. When Jesus coupled this with the Aramaic word ‘Brooh’ (spirit) he was speaking of one who is so hungry to have a relationship with God that material things are of no value to him.

In *psalm 34* specifically the verse 19 ‘crushed in spirit’ is the closest we get to the phrase, “poor in spirit.” The entire psalm conveys this meaning.

Essenes:

In the 2nd century BC, there appeared in Palestine a religious community called the Essenes. They lived austere lives and devoted themselves to the study of Torah. According to the first century historian Josephus an initiate had to vow to be pious before God, to practice justice before men and never to injure anyone, either willfully or under compulsion. In one passage from the Essene hymnbook, the author thanks God for destining him “to proclaim to the meek the multitude of Thine mercies and to let them that of contrite spirit hear salvation from his everlasting source, and to them that mourn, everlasting joy.” These correspond to “the meek,” “the poor in spirit,” and “those that mourn,” of the first three beatitudes.

Poor and Poor in Spirit:

The ‘Poor’ of Luke and the ‘Poor in Spirit’ of Matthew have the same connotation. The gospel writers may have altered the words of an individual logion or discourse of Jesus to emphasize a particular aspect, but they retain the essential meaning.

The beggar (πτοχος), the poor (πενης), the ‘Anawim’ and the ‘Miskaneh’ reflect material poverty. This does not mean that one must be poor in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. If it were merely a social state of being, then all of those who are in such a state would ‘own’ the kingdom. But this beatitude is not just for the poor and the marginalized, but also for all followers of Jesus Christ.

“Blessed” does not connote material wealth, but instead describes righteousness in the eyes of God. “Woe” does not indicate instant damnation, but instead describes a denunciation and a warning that one is not fulfilling the responsibilities given in the commandments of Jesus Christ. For we cannot forget that these words were addressed to the disciples of that time, but should also be extrapolated to all followers of Christ. Once again, this passage is eschatological in nature, but should not be thought of as only applying to the future. These blessings and woes are applied to people displaying the respective behaviors on this very day.

For theirs is the kingdom:

Kingdom of heaven (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) and kingdom of God (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ) are interchangeable. The kingdom of God throughout Scripture has an almost dualistic meaning, speaking to both a present reality and a future consummation. Jesus says that “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12:28). He also points out that he will not drink the wine “until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mk 14:25)

The kingdom is at once both gift and promise. It has already been given to us in Jesus, but it has yet to be realized in its fullness. That is why we pray to the Father each day: “Thy kingdom come”.

In conclusion it can be said that the signification of poor in Luke 6:20 is similar to that of a developing usage of ‘crushed’ in the Psalms, Isaiah, and the Essenes. It symbolically relates to religious attitude. Matthew makes this quite clear by the emphasis on the ‘in spirit.’

The teaching intent of Matthew and Luke centers in the theme of identification with God's kingdom. Such identification will entail persecution, including physical, mental, and social ramifications. But the transitory nature of life and its problems are not to be compared to the eschatological hope.

The Second Beatitude

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted (Mt 5:4)
μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

This beatitude finds its roots in Isaiah 61:1-2 where God anoints a person “to bind up the brokenhearted and to comfort all who mourn.”

Mourn (πενθέω):

The Greek word πενθουντες “pentountes” (Lk 6:25; Mk 16:10; Jas 4:9; Rev 18:11,15,19); means “to mourn, grieve;” “to mourn for, lament” The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) uses this term in reference to mourning over the dead, and for the sorrows and sins of others.

Mourning was marked by throwing dust on the head (Jos 7:6), by wearing sackcloth, sitting in ashes, lacerating the flesh, and tearing out the hair of the head and face (Jer 16:6). Such self-mutilation, however, was forbidden by Moses (Lev 21:5 Deu 14:1). Other forms of mourning are indicated in (Eze 24:17), as (1) crying, (2) removing the head-dress, (3) removing the shoes, (4) covering the lips as a guard of silence, (5) eating “the bread of mourners” (Hos 9:4).

Jewish religious stipulations approved of mourning but regulated it. Excessive mourning was discouraged, as it would imply that the mourner was possessed of more pity than the Almighty. However, Greek and Roman consolation literature addressed mourning as the practice of the uneducated masses.

Matthew 5:4 and Luke 6:21:

Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh (Lk 6:21)

But woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep (Lk 6:25)

The poor, mourning and weeping have already become something of a focus for Jesus’ ministry and continue to be so throughout Luke. They first appear in the Magnificat, where Mary praises God because he is working on behalf of the oppressed (1:50–53).

They appear again in the quotation from Isaiah in the Nazareth sermon (Lk 4:18–19). Luke’s blessings and woes contrast the blessings in Deuteronomy 28 where the blessed were prosperous and the cursed destitute.

In the beatitudes, ‘the suffering’ are those whose circumstances will be changed due to the arrival of God’s kingdom. This change is future in an eschatological, end times sense, but also has implications in a more immediate way.

In the remainder of the Sermon on the Plain, Luke’s Jesus encourages his followers to be generous towards those less fortunate (Lk 6:33–36). They are part of the solution. This theme of generosity

continues throughout the Gospel becoming the focus of the Parable of the Banquet (Lk 14:7–24) and an underlying theme in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in (Lk 16:19–31).

Comforted, παρακληθησονται:

παρακληθησονται (paraklethisontai) is a compound word translated “comfort” in this passage. It is derived from παρα, “from the side of,” and καλεω, “to call” or “to summon;” denoting one called or summoned from another to their side. It can also mean “called near,” and refers to those who are invited by God to Himself. The term, therefore, implies one who is called to another's side in order to receive aid and comfort from him, or one who comes to aid as an advocate in a court of justice.

The poor are given the kingdom of God in the present rather than the future. However, the “nowbut-not-yet” nature of the kingdom implies that the result of their possession of the kingdom will have a limited impact on their lives in the present, but a greater impact in the future.

Understanding Luke's beatitudes and woes as covenant blessings and curses highlights the importance of a person's response to God, their faithful obedience, rather than their social and economic circumstances. A choice is laid before Luke's audience, before the followers of Jesus. Just as Deuteronomy 28 is addressed to Israel, these beatitudes and woes are addressed to Christians and those considering following Jesus.

The Third Beatitude

Blessed are the Meek for they will inherit the land (Mt 5:5)

μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν.

Jesus was meek and lowly of heart, yet He drove the money changers out of the temple with a zeal and righteous anger. So, what does it actually mean to be meek?

Meek:

The negative connotation of “meekness” suggests the idea of passivity, someone who is easily imposed upon, spinelessness, weakness or deficient in courage. But meekness is not weakness. Meekness is harnessing the passions and dispositions of the heart and clothing them with a gentle spirit.

The word “meek” comes from the Hebrew word “anav” אָנָוּ which means “poor, humble, afflicted, lowly, meek.” It comes from the primitive Hebrew root “anah” אָנָּה which means “to afflict, oppress, humble, be afflicted, be bowed down.” Anawim is used to describe Moses: “Now the man Moses was very anawim, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3).

Other Bible passages of anawim are: The meek/humble shall eat and be satisfied (Ps 22:26); But the meek shall inherit the earth (Ps 34:11); God lifts up the meek (Ps 147:6); But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth (Is 11:4); God has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek (Is 61:1); and Seek God, all you meek/humble of the land (Zep 2:3).

In Greek the word πραύς (praus) “meekness” means “power under control.” Prais was used often by the Greeks to describe a war horse that was trained to obey instantly and absolutely, no matter how great the confusion during battle. A meek person is one who has the passion of resentment under control, and who is therefore tranquil and untroubled.

Jesus is meek and lowly of heart. Jesus shows meekness at his trial, where he refuses to defend himself. He is poised and in control, but he refuses to make claims for himself or to mount a defense. Yet He drove the money changers out of the temple with a zeal and righteous anger. He lashes Pharisees with his tongue. He exercises authority over illness and demons.

The meekness of the Christian springs from a sense of the inferiority of the creature to the Creator, and of the sinful creature to the holy God.

Inherit the Land:

The 'earliest' place we find this specific combination of the Hebrew verb 'inherit' (יָרַשׁ) and the noun land אֶרֶץ is in the promise of God to Abraham (Gen 15:7; 28.4); (Lev 20.24); (Num 21.24,35);

33.52-55); (Jos 1.11,15; 12.1). As the narrative of Genesis continues, it becomes clear this ארץ is the 'land' that Abram's descendants would settle to live in.

Psalm 37 says, “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps 37:11).

The Greek Old Testament (LXX) translates 'רָצָה' (take possession) with κληρονομέω (“inherit”). “The Hebrew implicates possession of land while the LXX accents inheritance. Jewish tradition pushed the promise into an eschatological future.

The eschatological Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel should be read in conjunction with other passages that speak of Gentile inclusion in the kingdom of God (Mt 8:11; 25:34).

The Old Testament land promises do not cross over to the New Testament unchanged. Matthew 5:5 presents the land promises as fulfilled in Christ. Christ is the greater David who fulfills the promises of Psalm 37 and Christ is Isaiah’s servant who fulfills the promises of Isaiah 61.

Psalm 37 has in mind some sort of future judgment of the wicked and future blessing of the righteous. Jesus seems to be saying that if we are humble and rely on God rather than striving to punish those who have done us wrong, that we can trust that God will win the day.

Jesus would also view the land promise as to be fulfilled eschatologically with an inheritance of the whole earth, not just the land of Israel.

Our inheritance is also spiritual (Acts 20:32); we are heirs in the kingdom of Christ (Eph 5:5), and citizenship in that kingdom is available now on this earth (Jn 3:3-5; Col 1:13).

The Fourth Beatitude

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

This beatitude is the equivalent of Luke 6:21a: ‘Blessed are those who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied’. Matthew added “and thirst after righteousness.”

Hunger and thirst:

The beatitude depicts the hunger pangs of a first century Palestinian laborer who knew what it was like to go without food and the experience of the heat of the desert and the thirst it induces. The image of hunger and thirst compares the drive for righteousness with our deepest needs (Ps. 42:3; 63:1). Hunger and thirst constantly cry out for satisfaction; it is a basic human drive. This beatitude describes our passion, hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Righteousness:

The noun righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) occurs seven times in Matthew (Mt 3:15; 5: 6,10, 20, 6:1, 33; 21:32). Matthew utilizes the term of righteousness to define the identity of his community in contrast to outsider groups. Righteousness is used to describe the proper behavioral norms of his community which distinguish them from outsiders. The Gospel not only reflects their *norms* but also impacts on their *identity* as followers of Jesus.

There are two interpretations for righteousness: The first is to interpret it as God’s eschatological gift of justice that would come in the eschatological era. God’s exercise of justice, leading to the eschatological vindication of the poor, meek and persecuted disciples. Righteousness would refer to God’s righteous punishment of a society that deprives the downtrodden of life and resources for living (Is 61) and reward to the just.

The second interpretation is to view righteousness in an ethical sense as a *virtue* required from the disciples. In such a case, it is the desire and aim to live in full accordance to the will of God. Matthew emphasizes the correct lifestyle for the followers of Jesus in contrast to that of the scribes and the Pharisees as a ‘*counter culture*’ of the disciples.

Matthew’s argument is not that righteous behavior *earns* salvation, but that it is the *fruit* of insights into God’s ways. Righteousness does not *create* a relationship with Jesus but is the *result* thereof. *It is a given righteousness, not an achieved one.* The blessed one does not achieve it but hungers and thirsts for it.

Filled:

“Shall be filled” (χορτασθήσονται) refers to animals being fed with *fodder*. The multitudes were satisfied (Mt 14:20; Lk 9:17); God has filled the hungry with good things (Lk 1:53); and they shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore (Rev 7:16-17). It also means Messianic Abundance (Is 55:1-3; 65:13); (Jn 4:14; 6:35; 7:37-38); (Ps 17:15). This fulfilment is both imminent and eschatological.

Pastoral application:

Joseph:

Joseph was a righteous or just man. Jewish, Greek, and Roman law all demanded that a man divorce his wife if she were guilty of adultery. Joseph, being a righteous Jew, was careful to

keep the Law of Moses, which allowed separation for infidelity (Deut 24:1). Each time God commanded Joseph to do something (take Mary as his wife, flee to Egypt, return from Egypt, don't go back to Judea), Joseph faithfully obeyed (Mt 1:24; 2:13-14; 19-21, 22).

John the Baptist:

When John tried to dissuade Jesus from baptizing him, Jesus responded that he had to be baptized by John so that all righteousness could be fulfilled for them (Mt 3:15). Both Jesus and John had to act in a way that is faithful to their covenant relationship with God. They did what God wanted, and thus fulfilled God's plans set forth for each of them respectively in the predictions of the Jewish scriptures. Righteousness as demonstrated by Jesus and John is the goal for Jesus' disciples to pursue.

Pharisee and Tax Collector:

Pharisee comes from the Hebrew "perusim," which means "separated ones;" or from the Hebrew parosim, meaning "specifier." They observed the purity laws in and outside the Temple. They were the most accurate expositor of the Jewish law and recited the Shema (Deu 6:4-9) three times a day. Teaching the 'halakha' ("the walk"), a corpus of laws derived from a close reading of sacred texts, they followed the traditions of the elders and interpreted them.

Telones, toll-collectors (those engaged in the collection of indirect taxes such as tolls, tariffs, imposts, and customs) were small business men, wealthy and belonged to the upper-middle or upper classes of society. They collected taxes in cash and could only demand taxes within a set amount. But they made their profit by collecting more than the sum contracted to the state. The profit generally amounted to 12% per annum. Because tax collectors were in relationship with Rome, who were Gentiles in the eyes of the Jews, and hated for their domination, they were treated similar to the worst kinds of sinners and prostitutes.

Their prayer and justification:

The Pharisee *took up his position* and spoke this prayer *to himself*: 'I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'

The Tax collector *stood off at a distance* and would *not even raise his eyes* to heaven. He beat his breast and prayed 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'

Jesus said, "I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Righteousness is a gift of God and the righteous God will vindicate the just and punish the unjust. Righteousness of humans is a required virtue as disciples of Jesus. Those who passionately seek this righteousness will be filled by the blessings of God.

The Fifth Beatitude

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Mt 5:7)

“μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.”

The word mercy, among the Jews, signified two things:

The pardon of injuries and almsgiving.

The Latin word for mercy is ‘misericordia’ (miser, cor, dia). The word means “the heart (cor) of God (deus) touching our misery (miser).” God enters into our misery by becoming man in the Person of Christ.

The Merciful (οἱ ἐλεήμονες):

Literally the word *ἔλεος* (Eleos) is the feeling of opposition to the desire for revenge and cruelty. ‘Eleos’ is derived from the Hebrew ‘chil’ (to be in pain) as a woman in travail; or from ‘galal,’ (to cry or lament) grievously. It is the response to human need (Mt 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; (Mk 5:19); (Lk 6:36); (Jas 2:13), because a merciful man enters into the miseries of his neighbor, feels for and mourns with him. Mercy begins with sympathy but then moves to action.

Mercy is the moral quality of feeling compassion and especially of showing kindness towards someone in need. This can refer to human kindness and to God’s kindness to humanity.

Whenever we say *Κύριε, ἐλέησον* (Lord have mercy), we implore the mercy of God, but simultaneously affirming that we will show mercy to our brothers and sisters.

Shown mercy (ἐλεηθήσονται):

The exercise of mercy or active pity tends to elicit mercy from others – God and men.

The ‘mercy for mercy’ principle is used to describe divine-human interpersonal relationships. This principle comes to fuller expression in Mt 6:12, 14 and 15 and in 18:23-35. There is a relationship between ‘conditioned mercy’ and ‘conditioned forgiveness.’ The thematic connection between the Beatitudes and the prayer (6:14-15) and the parable (Mt 18:23-35) is of great significance.

If it is true that the merciful will receive mercy, it is also true that those who have received mercy are more inclined to give mercy. Having needed mercy, they can sympathize with those who need mercy. In that sense, mercy is cyclical.

Pastoral Application:

The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37):

“What must I do to inherit *eternal life*?”

“Who is my neighbor?” (Pro 3:29) (Lev 19:17-18)

“Every human being” (Lk 10:36-37)

“Go and do likewise”

Jesus turned the focus of the original question from “Who is my neighbor?” to “Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?”

In other words, “Who was the one that was neighbor to the one in need?” The lawyer himself answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.”

The conviction of the lawyer that ‘my neighbor is a fellow Israelite’ is shattered by this story. The right question is not so much “who is my neighbor?”; as “To whom can I be a neighbor?” Hence, neighbor in this story is not a person in need; rather neighbor is the one who feels or who is moved with pity for people and their needs.

Unforgiving servant (Mt 18:21-35):

A servant owed the king 10,000 talents – an immense and practically uncollectible amount, likely in the millions of dollars. By ancient custom, a creditor could sell a debtor, with his family, into servitude for a time sufficient to pay a debt. But when the servant entreated the king to have mercy on him, the king, “moved with compassion,” forgave the entire debt! The forgiven servant then found one who owed him 100 denarii or about \$15. Without mercy, he had his debtor jailed until all was paid. Jesus said, “So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.”

Our Father:

“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Matthew 6:12, 14-15 and 18:23-35 discuss conditionality in divine-human relationship. Human mercy has the purpose of causing divine mercy. God’s forgiveness of us is the result of our forgiveness of others.

The spiritual works of mercy:

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| To instruct the ignorant. | To counsel the doubtful. |
| To admonish sinners. | To bear wrongs patiently. |
| To forgive offences willingly. | To comfort the afflicted. |
| To pray for the living and the dead. | |

The corporal works of mercy:

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| To feed the hungry. | To give drink to the thirsty. |
| To clothe the naked. | To harbor the harbor less. |
| To visit the sick. | To ransom the captive. |
| To bury the dead. | |