

LET US BE POOR MANGERS, WHERE THE VIRGIN MARY MAY PLACE THE CHILD JESUS

Christmas Letter, 2005

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Foundress

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5:3).

Christ proclaims "blessed" meaning happy are those who are poor in spirit. This is a great teaching and a great revolution for the mind and for the human heart! How many would tell us that happiness is found in being poor in spirit, in being detached, in voluntarily renouncing our control over things, or that true joy is found in having freedom of heart. Yes, free. This includes, first of all, freedom from ourselves, our "attachments," "interests," and "projects" - all that has become a "treasure" for us. All these things that we guard, protect, defend and fight to keep are the riches that do not permit Christ to be born fully in our hearts. We must empty our hearts to be able to make room for the Child who, in the arms of His Mother, comes and wishes to abide in us.



To be poor in spirit means to empty ourselves of worldly treasures in order to be filled with spiritual treasures - the treasures of the Kingdom. It is an interior attitude; it is a state of the heart that Christ invites us to assume as a means to reach true happiness and authentic freedom. This is the only Beatitude that contains a promise of possessing here on earth, and afterwards in eternity, the greatest treasure - the Kingdom of Heaven.

What a paradox! Only he who dispossesses himself of everything is able to possess Everything - the infinite and the eternal, the Kingdom of God, God Himself. This is precisely where the joy of poverty resides - in emptying ourselves of everything to possess He who is everything.

The Beatitudes present us concrete conditions to reach the Kingdom. Yes, holiness, spiritual growth, spiritual maturity, and advancing on the road that leads us to the fullness of the Kingdom require a series of "conditions" that expand the heart to "open wide the door to Christ." (John Paul II, Homily, October 22, 1978, no. 5) There is no other way to experience the "treasures of the Kingdom" than being poor of heart.

Poverty in spirit is the actual and voluntary detachment of all in our hearts that occupies a place that belongs only to God, of all that opposes the interior liberty each of us, according to our vocation, should attain in order to be able to generously hear and do God's will. Servant of God John Paul II, when speaking of the beatitudes, and specifically of the poor in spirit, said to us, "The divine Teacher proclaims "blessed" and, we could say, "canonizes" first of all the poor in spirit, that is, those whose heart is free of prejudices and conditionings, and who are therefore totally disposed to the divine will. Their total and trusting fidelity to God presupposes renunciation and consistent self-detachment." (Homily, November 1, 2000)

What a profound reflection on this virtue. Poor are those whose hearts are free of "prejudices." In my understanding, this is directed to the mind since prejudices are ideas and ways of being that are deeply rooted in our manner of thinking, reasoning and assigning value to things. Prejudices are a very earthly way of "seeing and thinking."

All attachments to our own judgments, thoughts, and ways of seeing things are a wealth that those who are poor in spirit renounce in order to let themselves be formed by the mind of God since His ways are not our ways (cf. Is. 55:8). In fact, we can affirm that His ways are very different from ours in value and content.

The poor, according to Pope John Paul II, are those who have their hearts free of "conditionings." What does this mean? I believe he is speaking of those interior attitudes, of those selfish limitations, of those calculating actions of self-defense and evasion of sacrifice, of those amalgamations of interior forces that oppose the love and the will of God in our hearts. All of these often hidden conditions and oppositions constrain us in our generous, wholehearted and faithful following of Christ. All attachments to these 'conditionings' of the heart are a wealth that the poor in spirit renounce in order to make room for the great potentialities of love that reside in our hearts.

The Pope concludes the paragraph with words that, although simple, are very challenging: "Their total and trusting fidelity to God presupposes renunciation and consistent self-detachment." Generally, we think that the invitation to "leave everything" that Christ proposes to those who want to follow him refers primarily to material things, which we, in the measure appropriate to each vocation, generously surrender to God. However, this "everything" begins with a detachment from our very selves. "The one who would follow me must deny his very self" (cf. Lk 9:23). The first condition needed to attain the virtue of poverty of heart is a detachment from our own selves.

How much wealth we can have in our hearts—just because it is interior does not mean it is not wealth. "Wherever your treasure is, there is your heart" (Lk 12:34). That which is inside the heart is reflected on the

outside. The poor in spirit do not need much externally; since they have the interior habit of conforming themselves with little, they are happy with little. They do not ask or expect much; they do not construct castles in the sky; they do not seek their own personal satisfaction; they do not create grand illusions; they do not attribute success to their own efforts. They do not grasp at anything other than God, and they enjoy everything that God gives them because it comes from His hands. On the same token, because they are free, they can easily surrender everything back to the Lord. The poor in spirit look for God in everything; they look to God for everything; and in everything they see God as an end.

Only those poor of themselves can be filled with God and all He desires to give them. Only the poor in spirit can yield when the road they have been traveling is suddenly obstructed, when their dreams do not come true, when their plans disintegrate. Only the poor in spirit know how to give true value to things since their scale is not weighed down by their own expectations or sentiments, but rather, is completely emptied of their very selves - allowing everything to acquire its true weight and worth in God. Only the poor in spirit know how to live joyfully, not asking for anything, not demanding anything, but rather hoping for everything from God. They know that God gives in just measure - neither so much as to asphyxiate and distract the heart from its only treasure, nor too little so that the heart can not find it. The measure of what is more or less is not taken into the hands of he who is poor in spirit; rather, he abandons it to the hands of God, allowing Him to make the determination.

That is why, my brothers and sisters, to be poor in spirit is the fountain of joy, that joy that was announced to the shepherds: "I proclaim to you good news of great...today...a savior has been born for you" (Lk 2:10-11). A Savior came into the world in the simplicity of a manger, and from there He proclaimed - not with his words, but with an eloquent gesture - the Reign of God is for the poor in spirit, for those who have hearts as simple as a manger. In one of his recent Angelus reflections, His Holiness Benedict XVI invited us to place ourselves before a manger this Christmas, since *"the crib can help us, in fact, to understand the secret of the true Christmas, because it speaks of humility and the merciful goodness of Christ, who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor' (2 Corinthians 8:9). His poverty enriches those who embrace it and Christmas brings joy and peace to those who, as the shepherds, accept in Bethlehem the words of the angel: 'And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger' (Luke 2:12). It continues to be a sign also for us, men and women of the 21st century. There is no other Christmas"* (December 11, 2005).

May the poverty of the manger, a sign of the poverty of the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary, become a luminous message for us this Christmas: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."* (Mt. 5)

May the Blessed Mother, teacher of spiritual poverty, who at every moment kept Her Heart dispossessed of everything in order to welcome only the will of God, acquire for us this Christmas, through her maternal intercession, the grace of growing in such an exalted virtue so our hearts can become humble, poor, simple and joyful mangers where she can place the Child Jesus.

From the poverty of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, in union with St. Joseph,
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