

"BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, BECAUSE THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS THEIRS"

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Feast of St. Clare of Assisi

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Christ proclaims "Blessed," meaning, fortunate, happy, those who are poor in spirit. What a great lesson and what a great revolution for the human mind and heart. Who would have guessed that happiness is found in being poor, in being detached, in voluntarily renouncing dominion over things, in being detached of everything, including, or perhaps primarily- of even our very selves and all that is important to our hearts, all that has become for us a "treasure" that we carefully guard, take care of and defend, because in reality we have not understood what is the true treasure. That is why poverty of spirit is a state of the heart that Christ proclaims as a way to happiness, not only in heaven, but also here on earth. And even more, it is the only beatitude that brings with it the promise of possessing, here and in eternity, the greatest treasure: the kingdom of God.



What a paradox! Only those who dispossess themselves of everything can one day possess everything, that which is infinite and that which is eternal: the Kingdom of God- meaning God Himself. It is precisely in this that the happiness of poverty resides, in the emptying ourselves of everything in order to possess He Who is everything. The beatitudes present to us concrete and serious conditions for us to be able to reach the Kingdom. Yes, sanctity, our spiritual growth and maturity, advancing on the road that takes us to the fullness of the Kingdom, requires us to fulfill a series of conditions, pre-requisites and objectives in order for us to reach such a desired place. There is no other way of doing it. And the first condition needed in order for us to be able to possess the Kingdom is that we should be poor in spirit.

Today, feast of St. Clare of Assisi in a special way we (our community) celebrate the vow of poverty, meaning, that sacred and solemn promise that we have made before God, the Congregation and the Church, to make this beatitude a radical and visible life experience: leaving everything in order to more closely imitate the interior and exterior life of Christ our Lord and our Spouse.

Poverty of spirit is the actual and voluntary detachment from all that disorderly occupies our hearts, the space that belongs only to God. It is an emptying of all that opposes the interior freedom that the consecrated soul should have in order to freely be willing to follow the Lord's will wherever He leads her. Poverty of spirit is the internal attitude needed for the practical execution of the vow of poverty.

I present to you some words from the Servant of God John Paul II regarding the beatitudes, particularly, poverty of spirit: "The divine Master proclaims, "blessed" and we should say, "canonizes" before everyone else- the poor in spirit, that is to say, those who have their hearts free of prejudices and conditionings, and therefore, who are willing to accomplish in all things the divine will. The total and confident adhesion to God presupposes the coherent detachment from oneself. (November 1, 2000)

What a profound reflection of this virtue. Poor are those who have their hearts free of "prejudices." It seems to me that here, in a particular way, he is addressing the mind- since prejudices are criteria and patterns of thought that are too ingrained in our way of thinking, of reasoning and of valuing things. To prejudice is a very human way or very worldly way of "seeing and thinking." All attachment to our own judgments, thoughts or ways of seeing things is a richness that the poor in spirit renounce, in order to allow their minds to be formed with the thoughts and ways of God- which are not our own, but rather we could affirm- that they are actually quite different in their value and content.

Poor, according to John Paul II, are those who have their hearts free of "conditionings." What does that mean? I believe it is speaking of those interior attitudes: of the limitations of selfishness, of calculating self-defense mechanisms, and of avoidance of sacrifice- that amalgamation of interior forces that combat against grace and God's will. They are all those conditions that are often hidden, "subliminalized" with very spiritual words, or are covered by our personal justifications, etc., but in the final analysis, they keep us from making a generous, detached and faithful following of Christ. All attachments to the conditionings of the heart is a wealth that the poor in spirit renounce in order to allow themselves to be emptied, to be released from all that is carried inside, from all that distorts the faculties of the heart- to allow the heart to become the sanctuary of God's love and love for others.

John Paul II concludes this paragraph with very challenging, though simple words: "Total adhesion and trust in God pre-supposes the disinterested and coherent detachment from oneself". If we have left everything to follow Christ, our vocation implies, in a clear and concrete way, to primarily leave behind of our very selves.

We always think that this "leaving everything" refers primarily to leaving behind material things, which are also renounced. And yet, the "all" begins first of all with a detachment from ourselves. For this reason, Jesus would say to us: "Whoever would follow Me, he must deny himself" (Lk 9: 23-24). The first condition for the poverty needed to follow Jesus more closely is poverty of self, meaning, poverty of spirit. There needs to be a poverty from all we carry within and cling so much to it, just because it is not a material possession - it does not cease to be wealth. On the contrary, the poor in spirit do not need a lot externally, for they have the internal habit of conforming themselves with little, of being pleased with little, of not asking nor expecting much, of not dreaming up castles in the air, of not desiring great affective, emotional, nor even spiritual satisfactions, of not building glorious illusions, of not projecting themselves in their plans, of not being attached to anything other than God, not even to what they consider is a gift of God. The poor in spirit do not grasp but gratefully hold. They search in all, for all and as an end to all- God Himself.

Poverty of spirit is poverty from ourselves, from our excessive self-love, from our attachment to our own wills and desires. What great wisdom is revealed in the Beatitudes!

Only the poor, of their very selves, can fill themselves with God and all that he desires to give them. Only the poor in spirit can yield when the way they were walking is suddenly blocked, when their dreams are not fulfilled- but rather unravel, are postponed and are even lost. Only the poor in spirit know how to give things their true worth, since their scale is not weighed down by their own expectations or feelings, but rather is completely empty of self, allowing everything to acquire its true value and worth. Only the poor in spirit know how to live in joy, not asking for anything, not demanding anything, but rather expecting everything from God- knowing that God gives in just measure. God gives not too much at once- so that the heart is asphyxiated and distracted from its only treasure, nor so little- that it does not permit one to find Him and clearly see His provident love. But the more or the less for the poor in spirit, is not a measure taken by his own hand, but rather, he abandons himself in God's hands so that it is God Himself who measures.

To be poor of spirit is the reason for constant joy, poverty of heart is a fountain of joy. In order to live our vocation in joy and simplicity, to seek the kingdom above all things and to leave "all the extra things" that God gives, to not overburden our hearts with so many things... we need to be poor in spirit and thus say like St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:12-13).

To the Blessed Virgin Mary, teacher of poverty in spirit who knew at every moment to accept whatever God disposed and to hold God's decisions in her heart, I ask her to reach for us the graces to grow in such an exalted virtue, essential foundation for our vow of poverty. To St. Clare of Assisi, to whom we direct ourselves, imploring her intercession on this particular day, I ask her to teach us how to "leave everything" for the Bridegroom, and to discover in the gift of poverty of heart the liberty that stems from detaching ourselves from excessive self-love thus to attach ourselves solely to the Heart of the Lamb and to follow Him through the ways of love and holiness, on the road of the beatitudes.

In the poverty of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

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