

Christian to join in the rabbi's conversation with Jesus, so as to be guided toward a better understanding of the authentic Jewishness and the mystery of Jesus. Finally, an important part of the Sermon on the Mount is devoted to prayer—indeed, how could it be otherwise? This part culminates in the Our Father, by means of which Jesus intends to teach disciples of all times how to pray; he intends to place them before the face of God, thus guiding them along the path to life.

### THE BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes are not infrequently presented as the New Testament's counterpart to the Ten Commandments, as an example of the Christian ethics that is supposedly superior to the commands of the Old Testament. This approach totally misconstrues these words of Jesus. Jesus always presupposed the validity of the Ten Commandments as a matter of course (see, for example, Mk 10:19; Lk 16:17). In the Sermon on the Mount, he recapitulates and gives added depth to the commandments of the second tablet, but he does not abolish them (cf. Mt 5:21–48). To do so would in any case diametrically contradict the fundamental principle underpinning his discussion of the Ten Commandments: "Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Mt 5:17–18). This statement, which only *appears* to contradict the teaching of Saint Paul, will require further discussion after our examination of the dialogue between Jesus and the rabbi. For the

time being, it suffices to note that Jesus has no intention of abrogating the Ten Commandments. On the contrary, he reinforces them.

But what are the Beatitudes? First of all, they are situated within a long tradition of Old Testament teachings, such as we find in Psalm 1 and in the parallel text at Jeremiah 17:7–8: Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord. These are words of promise. At the same time, though, they are criteria for the discernment of spirits and so they prove to be directions for finding the right path. The setting in which Luke frames the Sermon on the Mount clarifies to whom the Beatitudes of Jesus are addressed: "He lifted up his eyes on his disciples." The individual Beatitudes are the fruit of this looking upon the disciples; they describe what might be called the actual condition of Jesus' disciples: They *are* poor, hungry, weeping men; they *are* hated and persecuted (cf. Lk 6:20ff.). These statements are meant to list practical, but also theological, attributes of the disciples of Jesus—of those who have set out to follow Jesus and have become his family.

Yet the menacing empirical situation in which Jesus sees his followers becomes a promise when his looking upon them is illuminated in the light of the Father. The Beatitudes, spoken with the community of Jesus' disciples in view, are paradoxes—the standards of the world are turned upside down as soon as things are seen in the right perspective, which is to say, in terms of God's values, so different from those of the world. It is precisely those who are poor in worldly terms, those thought of as lost souls, who are the truly fortunate ones, the blessed, who have every reason to rejoice and exult in the midst of their sufferings. The Beatitudes are promises resplen-

dent with the new image of the world and of man inaugurated by Jesus, his "transformation of values." They are eschatological promises. This must not, however, be taken to mean that the joy they proclaim is postponed until some infinitely remote future or applies exclusively to the next world. When man begins to see and to live from God's perspective, when he is a companion on Jesus' way, then he lives by new standards, and something of the *éschaton*, of the reality to come, is already present. Jesus brings joy into the midst of affliction.

The paradoxes that Jesus presents in the Beatitudes express the believer's true situation in the world in similar terms to those repeatedly used by Paul to describe his experience of living and suffering as an Apostle: "We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor 6:8-10). "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4:8-9). What the Beatitudes in Luke's Gospel present as a consolation and a promise, Paul presents as the lived experience of the apostle. He considers that he has been made "last of all," a man under a death sentence, a spectacle to the world, homeless, calumniated, despised (cf. 1 Cor 4:9-13). And yet he experiences a boundless joy. As the one who has been handed over, who has given himself away in order to bring Christ to men, he experiences the interconnectedness of Cross and Resurrection: We are handed over to death "so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4:11). In his messengers Christ himself

still suffers, still hangs on the Cross. And yet he is risen, irrevocably risen. Although Jesus' messenger in this world is still living the story of Jesus' suffering, the splendor of the Resurrection shines through, and it brings a joy, a "blessedness," greater than the happiness he could formerly have experienced on worldly paths. It is only now that he realizes what real "happiness," what true "blessedness" is, and, in so doing, notices the paltriness of what by conventional standards must be considered satisfaction and happiness.

The paradoxes that Saint Paul experienced in his life, which correspond to the paradoxes of the Beatitudes, thus display the same thing that John expresses in yet another way when he calls the Lord's Cross an "exaltation," an elevation to God's throne on high. John brings Cross and Resurrection, Cross and exaltation together in a single word, because for him the one is in fact inseparable from the other. The Cross is the act of the "exodus," the act of love that is accomplished to the uttermost and reaches "to the end" (Jn 13:1). And so it is the place of glory—the place of true contact and union with God, who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:7, 16). This Johannine vision, then, is the *ne plus ultra* in concentrating the paradoxes of the Beatitudes and bringing them within reach of our understanding.

This reflection upon Paul and John has shown us two things. First, the Beatitudes express the meaning of discipleship. They become more concrete and real the more completely the disciple dedicates himself to service in the way that is illustrated for us in the life of Saint Paul. What the Beatitudes mean cannot be expressed in purely theoretical terms; it is proclaimed in the life and suffering, and in the mysterious joy, of the disciple who gives himself over com-

pletely to following the Lord. This leads to the second point: the Christological character of the Beatitudes. The disciple is bound to the mystery of Christ. His life is immersed in communion with Christ: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The Beatitudes are the transposition of Cross and Resurrection into discipleship. But they apply to the disciple because they were first paradigmatically lived by Christ himself.

This becomes even more evident if we turn now to consider Matthew's version of the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12). Anyone who reads Matthew's text attentively will realize that the Beatitudes present a sort of veiled interior biography of Jesus, a kind of portrait of his figure. He who has no place to lay his head (cf. Mt 8:20) is truly poor; he who can say, "Come to me . . . for I am meek and lowly in heart" (cf. Mt 11:28-29) is truly meek; he is the one who is pure of heart and so unceasingly beholds God. He is the peacemaker, he is the one who suffers for God's sake. The Beatitudes display the mystery of Christ himself, and they call us into communion with him. But precisely because of their hidden Christological character, the Beatitudes are also a road map for the Church, which recognizes in them the model of what she herself should be. They are directions for discipleship, directions that concern every individual, even though—according to the variety of callings—they do so differently for each person.

Let us now take a somewhat closer look at each individual link in the chain of the Beatitudes. First of all, we have the much debated saying about the "poor in spirit." This term figures in the Qumran scrolls as the self-designation of the pious. They also call themselves "the poor of grace," "the poor of

thy redemption," or simply "the poor" (Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, I, p. 121). By referring to themselves in this way, they express their awareness of being the true Israel, thereby invoking traditions that are deeply rooted in Israel's faith. At the time of the Babylonian conquest of Judea, 90 percent of Judeans would have been counted among the poor; Persian tax policy resulted in another situation of dramatic poverty after the Exile. It was no longer possible to maintain the older vision according to which the righteous prosper and poverty is a consequence of a bad life (the so-called *Tun-Ergebens-Zusammenhang*, or conduct-life correspondence). Now Israel recognizes that its poverty is exactly what brings it close to God; it recognizes that the poor, in their humility, are the ones closest to God's heart, whereas the opposite is true of the arrogant pride of the rich, who rely only on themselves.

The piety of the poor that grew out of this realization finds expression in many of the Psalms; the poor recognize themselves as the true Israel. In the piety of these Psalms, in their expression of deep devotion to God's goodness, in the human goodness and humility that grew from it as men waited vigilantly for God's saving love—here developed that generosity of heart that was to open the door for Christ. Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, Zachariah and Elizabeth, the shepherds of Bethlehem, and the Twelve whom the Lord called to intimate discipleship are all part of this current, which contrasts with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but also, despite a great deal of spiritual affinity, with Qumran as well. They are the ones in whom the New Testament begins, in full awareness of its perfect unity with the faith of Israel that has been maturing to ever greater purity.

Silently evolving here was the attitude before God that Paul explored in his theology of justification: These are people who do not flaunt their achievements before God. They do not stride into God's presence as if they were partners able to engage with him on an equal footing; they do not lay claim to a reward for what they have done. These are people who know that their poverty also has an interior dimension; they are lovers who simply want to let God bestow his gifts upon them and thereby to live in inner harmony with God's nature and word. The saying of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux about one day standing before God with empty hands, and holding them open to him, describes the spirit of these poor ones of God: They come with empty hands; not with hands that grasp and clutch, but with hands that open and give and thus are ready to receive from God's bountiful goodness.

Because this is the case, there is no opposition between Matthew, who speaks of the poor in spirit, and Luke, in whose Gospel the Lord addresses the "poor" without further qualification. Some have claimed that Matthew took the concept of poverty that Luke originally understood in a totally material and real way, spiritualized it, and so robbed it of its radicalism. Yet anyone who reads the Gospel of Luke knows perfectly well that it is he who introduces us to the "poor in spirit"—the sociological group, one might say, among whom Jesus' earthly journey, and that of his message, could begin. Conversely, it is clear that Matthew remains completely in the tradition of piety reflected in the Psalms and so in the vision of the true Israel expressed in them.

The poverty of which this tradition speaks is never a purely material phenomenon. Purely material poverty does not

bring salvation, though of course those who are disadvantaged in this world may count on God's goodness in a particular way. But the heart of those who have nothing can be hardened, poisoned, evil—interiorly full of greed for material things, forgetful of God, covetous of external possessions.

On the other hand, the poverty spoken of here is not a purely spiritual attitude, either. Admittedly, not everyone is called to the radicalism with which so many true Christians—from Anthony, father of monasticism, to Francis of Assisi, down to the exemplary poor of our era—have lived and continue to live their poverty as a model for us. But, in order to be the community of Jesus' poor, the Church has constant need of the great ascetics. She needs the communities that follow them, living out poverty and simplicity so as to display to us the truth of the Beatitudes. She needs them to wake everyone up to the fact that possession is all about service, to contrast the culture of affluence with the culture of inner freedom, and thereby to create the conditions for social justice as well.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a social program per se, to be sure. But it is only when the great inspiration it gives us vitally influences our thought and our action, only when faith generates the strength of renunciation and responsibility for our neighbor and for the whole of society—only then can social justice grow, too. And the Church as a whole must never forget that she has to remain recognizably the community of God's poor. Just as the Old Testament opened itself through God's poor to renewal in the New Covenant, so too any renewal of the Church can be set in motion only through those who keep alive in themselves the same resolute humility, the same goodness that is always ready to serve.

Thus far, we have considered only the first half of the first Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." In both Matthew and Luke the promise assigned to them is as follows: "Theirs [yours] is the Kingdom of God [the Kingdom of heaven]" (Mt 5:3; Lk 6:20). "Kingdom of God" is the basic category of Jesus' message; here it becomes part of the Beatitudes. This context is important for a correct understanding of this much disputed term. We have already seen this in our examination of the meaning of the expression "Kingdom of God," and we will need to recall it frequently in the course of our further reflections.

But it may be a good idea—before we continue our meditation on the text—to turn for a moment to the figure whom the history of faith offers us as the most intensely lived illustration of this Beatitude: Francis of Assisi. The saints are the true interpreters of Holy Scripture. The meaning of a given passage of the Bible becomes most intelligible in those human beings who have been totally transfixed by it and have lived it out. Interpretation of Scripture can never be a purely academic affair, and it cannot be relegated to the purely historical. Scripture is full of potential for the future, a potential that can only be opened up when someone "lives through" and "suffers through" the sacred text. Francis of Assisi was gripped in an utterly radical way by the promise of the first Beatitude, to the point that he even gave away his garments and let himself be clothed anew by the bishop, the representative of God's fatherly goodness, through which the lilies of the field were clad in robes finer than Solomon's (cf. Mt 6:28–29). For Francis, this extreme humility was above all freedom for service, freedom for mission, ultimate trust in

God, who cares not only for the flowers of the field but specifically for his human children. It was a corrective to the Church of his day, which, through the feudal system, had lost the freedom and dynamism of missionary outreach. It was the deepest possible openness to Christ, to whom Francis was perfectly configured by the wounds of the stigmata, so perfectly that from then on he truly no longer lived as himself, but as one reborn, totally from and in Christ. For he did not want to found a religious order: He simply wanted to gather the People of God to listen anew to the word—without evading the seriousness of God's call by means of learned commentaries.

By creating the Third Order, though, Francis did accept the distinction between radical commitment and the necessity of living in the world. The point of the Third Order is to accept with humility the task of one's secular profession and its requirements, wherever one happens to be, while directing one's whole life to that deep interior communion with Christ that Francis showed us. "To own goods as if you owned nothing" (cf. 1 Cor 7:29ff.)—to master this inner tension, which is perhaps the more difficult challenge, and, sustained by those pledged to follow Christ radically, truly to live it out ever anew—that is what the third orders are for. And they open up for us what this Beatitude can mean for *all*. It is above all by looking at Francis of Assisi that we see clearly what the words "Kingdom of God" mean. Francis stood totally within the Church, and at the same time it is in figures such as he that the Church grows toward the goal that lies in the future, and yet is already present: The Kingdom of God is drawing near. . . .

Let us pass over for the time being the second Beatitude listed in Matthew's Gospel and go directly to the third, which is closely connected with the first: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). Some translations render the Greek word *praus* as "nonviolent" rather than "meek." This is a narrowing of the Greek term, which carries a great wealth of tradition. The third Beatitude is practically a Psalm citation: "The meek shall possess the land" (Ps 37:11). The word *praus* in the Greek Bible translates the Hebrew *anawim*, which was used to designate God's poor, of whom we spoke in connection with the first Beatitude. The first and third Beatitudes thus overlap to a large extent; the third Beatitude further illustrates an essential aspect of what is meant by poverty lived from and for God.

The focus is enlarged, though, when we take account of a few other texts in which the same word occurs. In Numbers 12:3 we read: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth." One cannot help thinking of Jesus' saying, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29). Christ is the new, the true Moses (this idea runs through the whole Sermon on the Mount). In him there appears the pure goodness that above all befits the great man, the ruler.

We are led even deeper when we consider another set of interconnections between the Old and New Testaments based around the word *praus*, "meek." In Zech 9:9-10, we read: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble [meek] and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim . . .

the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." This passage announces a poor king—a king whose rule does not depend on political and military might. His inmost being is humility and meekness before God and men. In this he is the exact opposite of the great kings of the world. And a vivid illustration is the fact that he rides on an ass—the mount of the poor, the counter-image of the chariot that he rejects. He is the king of peace—and by God's power, not his own.

There is a further element: His kingdom is universal, it embraces the whole earth. "From sea to sea"—behind this expression is the image of a flat earth surrounded on all sides by the waters, and it thus gives us an inkling of the world-spanning extent of his dominion. Karl Elliger is therefore correct when he says that "through all the fog" we do "glimpse with surprising distinctness the figure of the one who has now really brought the whole world the peace that passes all understanding. He has done so in filial obedience: by renouncing violence and accepting suffering until he was released from it by the Father. And so from now on he builds up his kingdom simply by the word of peace" (*Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, 24/25, p. 151). Only against this backdrop do we grasp the full scope of the account of Palm Sunday, only now do we understand what it means when Luke (and, in a similar vein, John) tells us that Jesus ordered his disciples to procure him a she-ass and her foal: "This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your king is coming to you, [meek] and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass"' (Mt 21:4-5; cf. Jn 12:15).

Unfortunately some translations obscure these interconnections by using different words to translate *praus*. Within the wide arc of these texts—from Numbers 12 through Zechariah 9 to the Beatitudes and the account of Palm Sunday—we can discern the vision of Jesus, the king of peace, who throws open the frontiers separating the peoples and creates a domain of peace “from sea to sea.” Through his obedience he calls us into this peace and plants it in us. The word *meek* belongs, on one hand, to the vocabulary of the People of God, to the Israel that in Christ has come to span the whole world. At the same time, it is a word related to kingship, which unlocks for us the essence of Christ’s new kingship. In this sense, we could say that it is both a Christological word and an ecclesiological one. In any case, it is a word that calls us to follow the one whose entry into Jerusalem mounted on an ass reveals the whole essence of his kingship.

In the text of Matthew’s Gospel, this third Beatitude is associated with the promise of the land: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land.” What does this statement mean? Hope for the land is part of the original content of the promise to Abraham. During Israel’s years of wandering in the desert, the promised land is always envisaged as the goal of the journey. In exile Israel waits for the return to the land. We must not overlook, however, that the promise of the land is clearly about something far greater than the mere idea of possessing a piece of ground or a national territory in the sense that every people is entitled to do.

The main issue in the foreground of the struggle for liberation prior to Israel’s exodus from Egypt is the right to freedom of worship, the people’s right to their own liturgy.

As time went by, it became increasingly clear that the promise of the land meant this: The land was given as a space for obedience, a realm of openness to God, that was to be freed from the abominations of idolatry. The concept of obedience to God, and so of the right ordering of the earth, is an essential component of the concept of freedom and the concept of the land. From this perspective, the exile, the withdrawal of the land, could also be understood: The land had itself become a zone of idolatry and disobedience, and the possession of the land had therefore become a contradiction.

A new and positive understanding of the diaspora could also arise from this way of thinking: Israel was scattered across the world so that it might everywhere create space for God and thus fulfill the purpose of creation suggested by the first creation account (cf. Gen 1:1–2, 4): The Sabbath is the goal of creation, and it shows what creation is for. The world exists, in other words, because God wanted to create a zone of response to his love, a zone of obedience and freedom. Step by step, as Israel accepted and suffered all the vicissitudes of its history as God’s people, the idea of the land grew in depth and breadth, shifting its focus increasingly away from national possession and increasingly toward the universality of God’s claim to the earth.

Of course, there is a sense in which the interplay between “meekness” and the promise of the land can also be seen as a perfectly ordinary piece of historical wisdom: Conquerors come and go, but the ones who remain are the simple, the humble, who cultivate the land and continue sowing and harvesting in the midst of sorrows and joys. The humble, the simple, outlast the violent, even from a purely historical point of view. But there is more. The gradual universalization of

the concept of the land on the basis of a theology of hope also reflects the universal horizon that we found in the promise of Zechariah: The land of the king of peace is not a nation-state—it stretches from “sea to sea” (Zech 9:10). Peace aims at the overcoming of boundaries and at the renewal of the earth through the peace that comes from God. The earth ultimately belongs to the meek, to the peaceful, the Lord tells us. It is meant to become the “land of the king of peace.” The third Beatitude invites us to orient our lives toward this goal.

Every eucharistic assembly is for us Christians a place where the king of peace reigns in this sense. The universal communion of Christ’s Church is thus a preliminary sketch of the world of tomorrow, which is destined to become a land of Jesus Christ’s peace. In this respect, too, the third Beatitude harmonizes closely with the first: It goes some way toward explaining what “Kingdom of God” means, even though the claim behind this term extends beyond the promise of the land.

With the foregoing remarks, we have already anticipated the seventh Beatitude: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt 5:9). A few observations on the main points of this fundamentally important saying of Jesus may therefore suffice. First of all, we glimpse the events of secular history in the background. In his infancy narrative, Luke had already suggested the contrast between this child and the all-powerful Emperor Augustus, who was renowned as the “savior of the universal human race” and as the great peacemaker. Caesar had already claimed the title “bringer of world peace.” The faithful in Israel would be reminded of Solomon, whose Hebrew name is rooted in the word for “peace” (*shalom*). The Lord had promised David: “I will give

peace and quiet to Israel in his days. . . . He shall be my son, and I will be his father” (1 Chron 22:9f.). This brings to the fore a connection between divine Sonship and the kingship of peace: Jesus is the Son, and he is truly Son. He is therefore the true “Solomon”—the bringer of peace. Establishing peace is part of the very essence of Sonship. The seventh Beatitude thus invites us to be and do what the Son does, so that we ourselves may become “sons of God.”

This applies first of all in the context of each person’s life. It begins with the fundamental decision that Paul passionately begs us to make in the name of God: “We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). Enmity with God is the source of all that poisons man; overcoming this enmity is the basic condition for peace in the world. Only the man who is reconciled with God can also be reconciled and in harmony with himself, and only the man who is reconciled with God and with himself can establish peace around him and throughout the world. But the political context that emerges from Luke’s infancy narrative as well as here in Matthew’s Beatitudes indicates the full scope of these words. That there be peace on earth (cf. Lk 2:14) is the will of God and, for that reason, it is a task given to man as well. The Christian knows that lasting peace is connected with men abiding in God’s *eudokia*, his “good pleasure.” The struggle to abide in peace with God is an indispensable part of the struggle for “peace on earth”; the former is the source of the criteria and the energy for the latter. When men lose sight of God, peace disintegrates and violence proliferates to a formerly unimaginable degree of cruelty. This we see only too clearly today.



Let us go back to the second Beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:4). Is it good to mourn and to declare mourning blessed? There are two kinds of mourning. The first is the kind that has lost hope, that has become mistrustful of love and of truth, and that therefore eats away and destroys man from within. But there is also the mourning occasioned by the shattering encounter with truth, which leads man to undergo conversion and to resist evil. This mourning heals, because it teaches man to hope and to love again. Judas is an example of the first kind of mourning: Struck with horror at his own fall, he no longer dares to hope and hangs himself in despair. Peter is an example of the second kind: Struck by the Lord's gaze, he bursts into healing tears that plow up the soil of his soul. He begins anew and is himself renewed.

Ezekiel 9:4 offers us a striking testimony to how this positive kind of mourning can counteract the dominion of evil. Six men are charged with executing divine punishment on Jerusalem—on the land that is filled with bloodshed, on the city that is full of wickedness (cf. Ezek 9:9). Before they do, however, a man clothed in linen must trace the Hebrew letter *tau* (like the sign of the Cross) on the foreheads of all those "who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in the city" (Ezek 9:4). Those who bear this mark are exempted from the punishment. They are people who do not run with the pack, who refuse to collude with the injustice that has become endemic, but who suffer under it instead. Even though it is not in their power to change the overall situation, they still counter the dominion of evil through the

passive resistance of their suffering—through the mourning that sets bounds to the power of evil.

Tradition has yielded another image of mourning that brings salvation: Mary standing under the Cross with her sister, the wife of Clopas, with Mary Magdalene, and with John (Jn 19: 25ff.). Once again, as in the vision of Ezekiel, we encounter here the small band of people who remain true in a world full of cruelty and cynicism or else with fearful conformity. They cannot avert the disaster, but by "suffering with" the one condemned (by their *com-passion* in the etymological sense) they place themselves on his side, and by their "loving with" they are on the side of God, who is love. This "*com-passion*" reminds us of the magnificent saying in Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's commentary on the Song of Songs (sermon 26, no. 5): "*Impassibilis est Deus, sed non impassibilis*"—God cannot suffer, but he can "*suffer with*." At the foot of Jesus' Cross we understand better than anywhere else what it means to say "blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Those who do not harden their hearts to the pain and need of others, who do not give evil entry to their souls, but suffer under its power and so acknowledge the truth of God—they are the ones who open the windows of the world to let the light in. It is to those who mourn in this sense that great consolation is promised. The second Beatitude is thus intimately connected with the eighth: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10).

The mourning of which the Lord speaks is nonconformity with evil; it is a way of resisting models of behavior that the individual is pressured to accept because "everyone does

it." The world cannot tolerate this kind of resistance; it demands conformity. It considers this mourning to be an accusation directed against the numbing of consciences. And so it is. That is why those who mourn suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness. Those who mourn are promised comfort; those who are persecuted are promised the Kingdom of God—the same promise that is made to the poor in spirit. The two promises are closely related. The Kingdom of God—standing under the protection of God's power, secure in his love—that is true comfort.

The converse is also true. The sufferer is not truly comforted, his tears are not completely wiped away, until he and the powerless of this world are no longer threatened by murderous violence; comfort is not brought to completion until even past sufferings never previously understood are lifted up into the light of God and given the meaning of reconciliation by his goodness; true comfort only appears when the "last enemy," death (cf. 1 Cor 15:26), and all its accomplices have been stripped of their power. Christ's words about comforting thus help us to understand what he means by "Kingdom of God" (of the heavens), while "Kingdom of God" gives us in turn an idea of what consolation the Lord holds in store for all those who mourn and suffer in this world.

There is one further observation that we have to add here. Jesus' words concerning those persecuted for righteousness' sake had a prophetic significance for Matthew and his audience. For them this was the Lord foretelling the situation of the Church which they were living through. The Church had become a persecuted Church, persecuted "for righteousness' sake." *Righteousness* in the language of the Old Covenant

is the term for fidelity to the Torah, to the word of God, as the Prophets were constantly reminding their hearers. It is the observance of the right path shown by God, with the Ten Commandments at its center. The term that in the New Testament corresponds to the Old Testament concept of righteousness is *faith*. The man of faith is the "righteous man" who walks in God's ways (cf. Ps 1; Jer 17:5–8). For faith is walking with Christ, in whom the whole Law is fulfilled; it unites us with the righteousness of Christ himself.

The people who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are those who live by God's righteousness—by faith. Because man constantly strives for emancipation from God's will in order to follow himself alone, faith will always appear as a contradiction to the "world"—to the ruling powers at any given time. For this reason, there will be persecution for the sake of righteousness in every period of history. This word of comfort is addressed to the persecuted Church of all times. In her powerlessness and in her sufferings, she knows that she stands in the place where God's Kingdom is coming.

If, then, we may once again identify an ecclesiological dimension, an interpretation of the nature of the Church, in the promise attached to this Beatitude, as we did in the case of earlier ones, so too we can identify a Christological basis to these words: The crucified Christ is the persecuted just man portrayed in the words of Old Covenant prophecy—particularly the Suffering Servant Songs—but also prefigured in Plato's writings (*The Republic*, II 361e–362a). And in this guise he himself is the advent of God's Kingdom. This Beatitude is an invitation to follow the crucified Christ—an invitation to the individual as well as to the Church as a whole.

The Beatitude concerning the persecuted contains, in the words that conclude the whole passage, a variant indicating something new. Jesus promises joy, exultation, and a great reward to those who for his sake are reviled, and persecuted, and have all manner of evil uttered falsely against them (cf. Mt 5:11). The "I" of Jesus himself, fidelity to his person, becomes the criterion of righteousness and salvation. In the other Beatitudes, Christology is present, so to speak, in veiled form; here, however, the message that he himself is the center of history emerges openly. Jesus ascribes to his "I" a normative status that no teacher of Israel—indeed, no teacher of the Church—has a right to claim for himself. Someone who speaks like this is no longer a prophet in the traditional sense, an ambassador and trustee of another; he himself is the reference point of the righteous life, its goal and center.

Later in the course of our meditations, we will come to see that this direct Christology is constitutive of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. What is here only touched upon will be developed further as we proceed.

Let us turn now to one of the two Beatitudes still to be discussed: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Mt 5:6). This saying is intrinsically related to Jesus' words concerning those who mourn and who will find comfort. In the earlier Beatitude, the ones who receive the promise are those who do not bow to the diktat of the prevailing opinions and customs, but resist it by suffering. Similarly, this Beatitude is concerned with those who are on the lookout, who are in search of something great, of true justice, of the true good. One of the textual strands of the Book of Daniel contains a statement that tra-

dition has come to regard as a synthesis of the attitude that is under consideration here. Daniel is described there as a *vir desideriorum*, as a man of longings (Dan 9:23 in the Latin Vulgate). The people this Beatitude describes are those who are not content with things as they are and refuse to stifle the restlessness of heart that points man toward something greater and so sets him on the inward journey to reach it—rather like the wise men from the East seeking Jesus, the star that shows the way to truth, to love, to God. The people meant here are those whose interior sensitivity enables them to see and hear the subtle signs that God sends into the world to break the dictatorship of convention.

At this point, who can fail to be reminded of the humble saints in whom the Old Covenant opens itself to the New, and is transformed into it? Of Zachariah and Elizabeth, of Mary and Joseph, of Simeon and Anna, all of whom, in their different ways, await the salvation of Israel with inner watchfulness and who by their humble piety, their patient waiting and longing, "prepare the way" of the Lord? But do we also think of the twelve Apostles—of these men who, though coming (as we will see) from totally different intellectual and social backgrounds, had kept their hearts open amid their work and their everyday lives, ready to respond to the call of something greater? Or of the passion for righteousness of a man such as Paul, a misguided passion that nonetheless prepared him to be cast down by God, and so brought to a new clarity of vision? We could continue in this vein throughout the whole of history. Edith Stein once said that anyone who honestly and passionately searches for truth is on the way to Christ. It is of such people that the Beatitude speaks—of

this thirst and hunger that is blessed because it leads men to God, to Christ, and therefore opens the world to the Kingdom of God.

It seems to me that this is the place to say something, based upon the New Testament, about the salvation of those who do not know Christ. The prevailing view today is that everyone should live by the religion—or perhaps by the atheism—in which he happens to find himself already. This, it is said, is the path of salvation for him. Such a view presupposes a strange picture of God and a strange idea of man and of the right way for man to live. Let us try to clarify this by asking a few practical questions. Does someone achieve blessedness and justification in God's eyes because he has conscientiously fulfilled the duties of blood vengeance? Because he has vigorously fought for and in "holy war"? Or because he has performed certain animal sacrifices? Or because he has practiced ritual ablutions and other observances? Because he has declared his opinions and wishes to be norms of conscience and so made himself the criterion? No, God demands the opposite: that we become inwardly attentive to his quiet exhortation, which is present in us and which tears us away from what is merely habitual and puts us on the road to truth. To "hunger and thirst for righteousness"—that is the path that lies open to everyone; that is the way that finds its destination in Jesus Christ.

There is one more Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8). The organ for seeing God is the heart. The intellect alone is not enough. In order for man to become capable of perceiving God, the energies of his existence have to work in harmony. His will must be pure and so

too must the underlying affective dimension of his soul, which gives intelligence and will their direction. Speaking of the *heart* in this way means precisely that man's perceptive powers play in concert, which also requires the proper interplay of body and soul, since this is essential for the totality of the creature we call "man." Man's fundamental affective disposition actually depends on just this unity of body and soul and on man's acceptance of being both body and spirit. This means he places his body under the discipline of the spirit, yet does not isolate intellect or will. Rather, he accepts himself as coming from God, and thereby also acknowledges and lives out the bodiliness of his existence as an enrichment for the spirit. The heart—the wholeness of man—must be pure, interiorly open and free, in order for man to be able to see God. Theophilus of Antioch (d. ca. 180) once put it like this in a debate with some disputants: "If you say, 'show me your God,' I should like to answer you, 'show me the man who is in you.' . . . For God is perceived by men who are capable of seeing him, who have the eyes of their spirit open. . . . Man's soul must be as pure as a shining mirror" (*Ad Autolyicum*, I, 2, 7ff.).

This prompts the question: How is man's inner eye purified? How to remove the cataract that blurs his vision or even blinds it altogether? The mystical tradition that speaks of a "way of purification" ascending to final "union" was an attempt to answer this question. The Beatitudes have to be read first and foremost in the context of the Bible. There, we meet the motif of purity of heart above all in Psalm 24, which reflects an ancient gate liturgy: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift

up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully" (Ps 24:3-4). Before the gate of the Temple, the question arises as to who may enter and stand in proximity to the living God. Clean hands and a pure heart are the condition.

The Psalm explains in many different ways the content of this condition for admission to God's dwelling place. One fundamental condition is that those who would enter into God's presence must inquire after him, must seek his face (Ps 24:6). The fundamental condition thus proves to be the same attitude that we saw earlier, described by the phrase "hunger and thirst for righteousness." Inquiring after God, seeking his face—that is the first and fundamental condition for the ascent that leads to the encounter with God. Even before that, however, the Psalm specifies that clean hands and a pure heart entail man's refusal to deceive or commit perjury; this requires honesty, truthfulness, and justice toward one's fellow men and toward the community—what we might call social ethics, although it actually reaches right down into the depths of the heart.

Psalm 15 elaborates further on this, and hence we can say that the condition for admission to God's presence is simply the content of the Decalogue—with an emphasis on the inward search for God, on journeying toward him (first tablet) and on love of neighbor, on justice toward the individual and the community (second tablet). No conditions specifically involving knowledge of Revelation are enumerated, only "inquiring after God" and the basic tenets of justice that a vigilant conscience—stirred into activity by the search for God—conveys to everyone. Our earlier reflection on the question of salvation finds further confirmation here.



On Jesus' lips, though, these words acquire new depth. For it belongs to his nature that he sees God, that he stands face-to-face with him, in permanent interior discourse—in a relation of Sonship. In other words, this Beatitude is profoundly Christological. We will see God when we enter into the "mind of Christ" (Phil 2:5). Purification of heart occurs as a consequence of following Christ, of becoming one with him. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). And at this point something new comes to light: The ascent to God occurs precisely in the descent of humble service, in the descent of love, for love is God's essence, and is thus the power that truly purifies man and enables him to perceive God and to see him. In Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself in his descending: "Though he was in the form of God," he "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. . . . He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him" (Phil 2:6-9).

These words mark a decisive turning point in the history of mysticism. They indicate what is new in Christian mysticism, which comes from what is new in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. God descends, to the point of death on the Cross. And precisely by doing so, he reveals himself in his true divinity. We ascend to God by accompanying him on this descending path. In this context, the "gate liturgy" in Psalm 24 receives a new significance: The pure heart is the loving heart that enters into communion of service and obedience with Jesus Christ. Love is the fire that purifies and unifies intellect, will, and emotion, thereby making man one with



himself, inasmuch as it makes him one in God's eyes. Thus, man is able to serve the uniting of those who are divided. This is how man enters God's dwelling place and becomes able to see him. And that is just what it means for him to be "blessed."

After this attempt to penetrate somewhat more deeply into the interior vision of the Beatitudes (the theme of the "merciful" is addressed not in this chapter, but in connection with the parable of the Good Samaritan), we must still briefly ask ourselves two questions that pertain to the understanding of the whole. In Luke's Gospel, the four Beatitudes that he presents are followed by four proclamations of woe: "Woe to you who are rich. . . . Woe to you who are full now. . . . Woe to you who laugh now. . . . Woe to you when all men praise you" (Lk 6:24-26). These words terrify us. What are we to think of them?

Now, the first thing to say is that Jesus is here following the pattern that is also found in Jeremiah 17 and Psalm 1: After an account of the right path that leads man to salvation, there follows a warning sign to caution against the opposite path. This warning sign unmasks false promises and false offers; it is meant to save man from following a path that can only lead him fatally over the precipice. We will find the same thing again in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

If we have correctly understood the signposts of hope that we found in the Beatitudes, we recognize that here we are dealing simply with the opposite attitudes, which lock man into mere outward appearance, into provisionality, into the loss of his highest and deepest qualities and hence into the loss of God and neighbor—the path to ruin. Now we come to understand the real intention of this warning sign: The proclama-

tions of woe are not condemnations; they are not an expression of hatred, or of envy, or of hostility. The point is not condemnation, but a warning that is intended to save.

But now the fundamental question arises: Is the direction the Lord shows us in the Beatitudes and in the corresponding warnings actually the right one? Is it really such a bad thing to be rich, to eat one's fill, to laugh, to be praised? Friedrich Nietzsche trained his angry critique precisely on this aspect of Christianity. It is not Christian doctrine that needs to be critiqued, he says, it is Christian morality that needs to be exposed as a "capital crime against life." And by "Christian morality," Nietzsche means precisely the direction indicated by the Sermon on the Mount.

"What has been the greatest sin on earth so far? Surely the words of the man who said 'Woe to those who laugh now?'" And, against Christ's promises, he says that we don't want the Kingdom of heaven. "We've become grown men, and so we want the kingdom of earth."

Nietzsche sees the vision of the Sermon on the Mount as a religion of resentment, as the envy of the cowardly and incompetent, who are unequal to life's demands and try to avenge themselves by blessing their failure and cursing the strong, the successful, and the happy. Jesus' wide perspective is countered with a narrow this-worldliness—with the will to get the most out of the world and what life has to offer now, to seek heaven here, and to be uninhibited by any scruples while doing so.

Much of this has found its way into the modern mindset and to a large extent shapes how our contemporaries feel about life. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount poses the ques-

tion of the fundamental Christian option, and, as children of our time, we feel an inner resistance to it—even though we are still touched by Jesus' praise of the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, the pure. Knowing now from experience how brutally totalitarian regimes have trampled upon human beings and despised, enslaved, and struck down the weak, we have also gained a new appreciation of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; we have rediscovered the soul of those who mourn and their right to be comforted. As we witness the abuse of economic power, as we witness the cruelties of a capitalism that degrades man to the level of merchandise, we have also realized the perils of wealth, and we have gained a new appreciation of what Jesus meant when he warned of riches, of the man-destroying divinity Mammon, which grips large parts of the world in a cruel stranglehold. Yes indeed, the Beatitudes stand opposed to our spontaneous sense of existence, our hunger and thirst for life. They demand "conversion"—that we inwardly turn around to go in the opposite direction from the one we would spontaneously like to go in. But this U-turn brings what is pure and noble to the fore and gives a proper ordering to our lives.

The Greek world, whose zest for life is wonderfully portrayed in the Homeric epics, was nonetheless deeply aware that man's real sin, his deepest temptation, is hubris—the arrogant presumption of autonomy that leads man to put on the airs of divinity, to claim to be his own god, in order to possess life totally and to draw from it every last drop of what it has to offer. This awareness that man's true peril consists in the temptation to ostentatious self-sufficiency, which

at first seems so plausible, is brought to its full depth in the Sermon on the Mount in light of the figure of Christ.

We have seen that the Sermon on the Mount is a hidden Christology. Behind the Sermon on the Mount stands the figure of Christ, the man who is God, but who, precisely because he is God, descends, empties himself, all the way to death on the Cross. The saints, from Paul through Francis of Assisi down to Mother Teresa, have lived out this option and have thereby shown us the correct image of man and his happiness. In a word, the true morality of Christianity is love. And love does admittedly run counter to self-seeking—it is an exodus out of oneself, and yet this is precisely the way in which man comes to himself. Compared with the tempting luster of Nietzsche's image of man, this way seems at first wretched, and thoroughly unreasonable. But it is the real high road of life; it is only on the way of love, whose paths are described in the Sermon on the Mount, that the richness of life and the greatness of man's calling are opened up.

#### THE TORAH OF THE MESSIAH

*"You Have Heard That It Was Said . . .*

*But I Say to You . . ."*

The Messiah was expected to bring a renewed Torah—his Torah. Paul may be alluding to this in the Letter to the Galatians when he speaks of the "law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). His great, passionate defense of freedom from the Law culminates in the following statement in chapter 5: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit