



GOD'S GRACIOUS GASH:
Does it Matter? It Must!

IN MY HOMILY LAST WEEK, I suggested that in light of the recent attack on our Capitol that a reckoning of sorts might be in order. An experience – a spiritual ordeal, if you will – of prayer, of examining our living in relation to the gospel, of repenting and reconciling, of conversion and change.

Our “national crisis of incivility, of indignity, of clamor and chaos,” I explained, compels something “from me, from you, from us.” The foundation of what I suggested is an assessment as to whether I really live the gospel of Jesus, whether we honestly live *the gospel with love and courage*, as our parish mission statement so boldly suggests.

Such an exercise, as I proposed, might best begin with the fundamental teachings in the New Testament, which is where I invite us to begin this week. I should confess, however, that what unfolds in upcoming weeks may not be as systematic or focused as the circumstance warrants. Like our country overall, I am responding to an immediate, urgent reality. As with all things, we trust in the Spirit for focus, direction, purpose and, ultimately, response.

We’ll begin our discernment at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry in Matthew’s gospel, the Sermon on the

Mount. Jesus introduces a litany of blessedness that we conveniently label “The Beatitudes.” Too often I fear we listen to them as a series of comforting assurances, but Jesus presents them as a



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BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

blueprint for a way of being that is so often contrary to the norm, the way we think things are or should be. “They are not simply future promises of what will happen, nor are they meant to reveal new teachings or truths,” says the Australian theologian Gerard Moore.

“Rather their intention is to surprise the hearer about what already is in place, about what already is known. As such they are reminders to the hearers of how God is already seeing and acting and judging.”

That imminence might warrant an even greater urgency from us in our effort to reconcile our lives and priorities with the way it is meant to be.

How blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

— Matthew 5:3

Gerard Moore describes well the importance of this first beatitude:

“One of the most interesting and fruitful interpretations of *blessed are the poor in spirit* is one that explores the possibilities inherent in ‘spirit.’ Spirit implies our awareness, our thinking, our consciousness. To be ‘poor in spirit’ has a sense of consciously and intentionally thinking through the actual condition of human beings as we are in this world. It is to stand before the poverty, misery, violence, pettiness and corruption that over and over again afflict the living and loving of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. It is to know that while I eat, others are hungry, that while I sleep, others have no shelter. It is to recognize that we humans spend more on guns than education or hospitals or mental health. If we are ‘poor in spirit’ we have no choice but to be aware of injustice, pollution, exploitation.”

A few questions to consider in prayer as we begin our assessment:

- What is your emotional state as you enter into this reckoning? Are you eager or reluctant, confident or anxious? Are you willing to be honest and look ahead, rather than behind?
- Can you identify a personal encounter or awareness of how “poverty, misery, violence, pettiness and corruption” afflict people you know, or maybe that in some way – by words, indifference, actions – have inflicted?
- Do you consider yourself “poor in spirit”? Do you want to be? **TL**