



THE BEATITUDES WERE on the agenda for a recent gathering of our fourth grade class of Forming Young Disciples. We studied a picture of the Mount of the Beatitudes as it appears today, and gained an appreciation of why Jesus chose to go up the mountain to begin his teaching. “So the people could hear him,” as one girl said, as if it were all so obvious.

We made our way through Jesus’ litany of blessing,

one by one, teaching by teaching, and we could describe and begin to understand, more or less, what Jesus was trying to convey, or at least as best as young minds might. Then, we came to “Happy are the pure in heart, they will see God!” (Yes, you read that correctly. Those who created this children’s translation apparently presumed “happy” was easier to grasp than “blessed,” indifferent to the fact that they don’t necessarily mean the same thing. One can be blessed without being happy. In any case ...)

What does it mean for a heart to be pure, or clean as other translations state? And, beyond that, what does it mean to “see God,” the good that comes to those with pure hearts?

In addition to its obvious, phys-

ically necessary work of pumping blood through our bodies, the heart is given a lot of symbolic purpose. A range of emotions, of priorities, of reactions are attributed to the heart. We speak of people by way of their hearts – a good



heart, a hardened hearted, a generous heart, a broken heart. As the disciples marvel upon what they’ve experienced on their Easter journey to Emmaus, they ask, “Were not our hearts burning within us?” We pray in Psalm 51 that God might create in us a clean heart, a pure heart.

We speak of good hearts and pray for clean hearts, even though we know that little of what we do and say, if anything, is derived from the heart. What we suggest and seek is beyond physical capability or understanding. To be among the “clean of heart” is more than merely thinking in a compassionate, generous manner. It’s a way of being that courses through our entire body, symbolically from our hearts, much as blood emanates and enlivens our physical bodies from our hearts.

But, as one of our fourth graders said with understandable frustration, “I still don’t get what a clean heart is.”

Many have attempted explanations. Our class workbook states, “We try to keep God first in our lives.” St. Theresa of Calcutta once observed, “A clean heart is a free heart. A free heart can love Christ with an undivided love.” Pope Francis says a pure heart is realized when the believer sorts through competing demands, when we “free the heart from its deception ... the inner deceptions that create our sins.”

Confronting our distortions, distractions, deceptions and darkness, we are liberated from sin, and our hearts, clean and pure, pump with greater purpose, with renewed generosity and compassion. Freed from our agendas, we can better appreciate the will and ways of God. It’s what leads us to imagine the fulfillment of this beatitude: to see God – not in some beatific vision, but in our celebration of the sacraments, in our all-too-ordinary encounters as disciples, in our resisting whatever distorts, distracts, deceives and darkens our hearts.

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