

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
March 3, 2013
Spiritual Ponderings
Beatitudes and the Cross

One of my favorite spiritual books is called *The Life of Christ*. One anonymous reviewer had this to say about the book: "An appealing blend of philosophy, history, and biblical exegesis, from the best-known and most-loved American Catholic leader of the twentieth century, *Life of Christ* has long been a source of inspiration and guidance. For those seeking to better understand the message of Jesus Christ, this vivid retelling of the greatest story ever lived is a must-read."

I have read the book several times and I always found myself especially intrigued by Archbishop Fulton Sheen's treatment of the Beatitudes. At one point he writes: "Because Christ preached them (the Eight Beatitudes), He had to die, Calvary was the price He paid for the Sermon on the Mount," and elsewhere he wrote "Two mounts are related as the first and second acts in a two-act drama: the Mount of the Beatitudes and the Mount of Calvary. He who climbed the first to preach the Beatitudes must necessarily climb the second to practice what he preached."

I recently came across another book written by Archbishop Fulton Sheen called: *The Cross and the Beatitudes: Lessons on Love and Forgiveness*. In the book Archbishop Fulton Sheen draws a connection between the Seven Last Words of Christ and the Eight Beatitudes. I thought that since we were in the middle of Lent that it would be a good idea to reflect on some of Archbishop Fulton Sheen's insights on the Beatitudes and the mystery of the Cross. I would be remised though if I did not spend some more time reflecting on some of Archbishop Fulton Sheen's insights from *The Life of Christ* before I moved onto his book *The Cross and the Beatitudes: Lessons on Love and Forgiveness*. I will therefore spend the rest of today's Spiritual Ponderings looking at some of his insights from the *Life of Christ* on the Beatitudes and the mystery of the Cross.

The first sermons of John the Baptist, Jesus, and St Peter (on Pentecost) could all be summarized by the word "Metanoia" which is often translated to the English word "repent." Unfortunately the word "repent" does not fully capture the meaning of the Greek word "Metanoia". "Metanoia" is more than just a moral word. It means something more along the lines of "stop everything and think about things in a totally new light." If you are going south then go north. If you are running then walk. Why though is there this call to stop everything and to think in a new way? It is because we human beings have gotten it all wrong. Human beings who have not gone through Metanoia (conversion) think differently than human beings who have or going through Metanoia. It is as if we have been taught all our life that $2+2=5$ and now we are being told the truth that $2+2=4$. What is it though that we have been taught wrong? It is the way to happiness. The world around us tells us that the way to happiness is to be strong, powerful, always in control, and being able to get whatever we want. Jesus appears on the scene two-thousand years ago to teach us that the way to true happiness (beatitude) is by being loving, meek, caring, and service oriented. We now have a choice to make.

This creates a dichotomy in the world. Those who follow the teachings of Jesus and those who follow the teachings of the world and because the teachings of the world are based not on love but power, control, etc. there cannot be peace between those who follow Jesus' teachings and those who followed the world. Archbishop Fulton Sheen put it this way: "One way to make enemies and antagonize people is to challenge the spirit of the world. The world has a spirit, as each age has a spirit. There are certain unanalyzed assumptions, which govern the conduct of the world. Anyone who challenges these worldly maxims, such as, 'you live only once,' 'get as much out of life as you can,' 'who will ever know about it,' 'what is sex for if not for pleasure?' is bound to make himself unpopular."

Two other quick quotes from the Life of Christ concerning the Beatitudes and the mystery of the Cross are: #1 "He never used a phrase that depended on the social order in which He lived; His Gospel was no easier then than it is now," and #2 "The Beatitudes cannot be taken alone: they are not ideals that they are hard facts and realities inseparable from the Cross of Calvary."



Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
March 10, 2013
Spiritual Ponderings
Beatitudes and the Cross

As we begin to explore Archbishop Fulton Sheen's book: *The Cross and the Beatitudes: Lessons on Love and Forgiveness*. Let us keep in mind that Jesus is the Truth, the Way, and the Life and that by studying His teaching and following His example will ultimately lead us to true happiness.

The first thing I thought it would be best to address the issue that there were Seven Last Words and Eight Beatitudes. In the forward to his book Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote: "The eighth beatitude, in the language of Saint Thomas Aquinas, 'is a confirmation and a declaration of all those that precede. Because from the very fact that a man is confirmed in poverty of spirit, meekness, and the rest, it follows that no persecution will induce him to renounce them. Hence the eighth beatitude corresponds in a way to all the preceding seven."

Is it not amazing that there are and have been so many Christians in the world? Especially when you think that in the Eighth Beatitude which reads: "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," that Jesus' promises His followers that they will be persecuted. I cannot think of a single sales pitch except the Christian message that promises its followers that they be persecuted. There are some groups that promote the fact that their group will be disliked and thus they must fight together to survive but that is not what Jesus is saying here. He tells us that being persecuted for the sake of righteousness means that we are on the right path. It is important though that the other seven beatitudes cannot also be applied to us when we are being persecuted otherwise we can become self-aggrandizing martyrs who are not really following Christ.

Beatitude: Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.

Seven Last Words: Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do

So now that we got the eighth beatitude out of the way let us look at our first pairing of the Last Seven Words to the Cross and the Eighth Beatitudes. "Our Blessed Lord began his public life on the Mount of Beatitudes, by preaching: 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.' He finished his public life on the Hill of Calvary by practicing that meekness: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,'" explains Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

The world today does not hold meekness up as a virtue. The world tells us that the way to happiness is through being vindictive, cunning, and wild. The world does not exalt the humble but rather the world exalts the aggressor. Fulton Sheen wrote: "Social and political forces have carried the spirit of violence, struggle for power, and the clenched fist to an extreme the like of which the world before has never seen." In order to right this wrong perception Jesus came not only preaching meekness but also practicing it.

Meekness Archbishop Fulton Sheen points out is a virtue that Jesus practiced all His life: "When his own people picked up stones to throw at him, he threw none back in return; when his fellow townsmen brought him to the brow of the hill to cast him over the precipice, he walked through their midst unharmed... When the swore to kill him, he did not use his power to strike dead even a single enemy; and now on the Cross, meekness reaches its peak, when to those who dig into the hands that feed the world, and to those who pierce the feet that shepherd souls, He pleads: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

What personally strikes me the most about this connection that Archbishop Fulton Sheen makes between Jesus' crucifixion and the Beatitude about meekness is how natural it is for me to attribute evil intentions to others. I am often quick to attribute evil intentions and motives to others actions instead of realizing that the person who has hurt me may have done so accidentally, irrationally out of a fear, or even that they may be reacting out of some past trauma. Let us pray that we may take the steps necessary to become meek in our daily lives by learning to forgive our brothers and sisters who have hurt us realizing that deep down they do not know what they are doing.



Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
March 17, 2013
Spiritual Ponderings
Beatitudes and the Cross

Let us move deeper into Archbishop Fulton Sheen's book: *The Cross and the Beatitudes: Lessons on Love and Forgiveness* as we explore the next two parts let us remind ourselves that our God is for us and not against us. There is no deceit in God and thus the reason why we should seriously consider His Beatitudes as our path to happiness.

Beatitude: Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.
Seven Last Words; This day you shall be with me in paradise.

"At the beginning of his public life, on the Hill of Beatitudes, Our Lord preached: 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy,' at the end of his public life, on the Hill of Calvary, he practiced that Beatitude as he addressed the thief: 'This day you shall be with me in paradise.'" The world tells us that true happiness when we think about ourselves first. It can seem like life for the world is a struggle for existence in which victory belongs only to the egotists. Generosity, graciousness, and concern are rare traits. Our world rather insists on "rights" and not on "duty."

Archbishop Fulton Sheen pointed out the following "the very word mercy is derived from the Latin miserum cor, a sorrowful heart. Mercy is, therefore, a compassionate understanding of another's unhappiness." A merciful person then is someone who feels the sorrow of another as his own.

We should not be surprised that Jesus offers mercy even now in moments of pain and anguish. He was always offering God's mercy and often to people who the rest of the world did not think deserved it for example, Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, Levi, and Peter after his deny Jesus three times.

On the day of His death, Jesus found himself hanging between two criminals both of whom were guilty of committing major crimes. The evangelists point out that they were not misunderstood revolutionaries but that in deed and in fact they were criminals. What their crime was we do not know for sure. One thief though is promised paradise and the other thief dies in his selfishness. Archbishop Fulton Sheen put it this way: "Because the thief on the right was merciful and compassionate, he received mercy and compassion. Because he was thoughtless of self, someone thought of him."

Beatitude: Blessed are the clean of heart; for they shall see God.
Seven Last Words: (Son) behold your mother, Woman, behold your son.

"On the Hill of the Beatitudes, at the beginning of his public life, Our Lord preached; 'blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.' Now at the end of his life, on the Hill of Calvary, he speaks to the clean of heart: '(Son) behold your mother, Woman, behold your son,'" writes Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

Our world today is not a world that rejoices in purity but rather it glorifies carnality, objectifying sex and hates restraints. In my opinion Blessed John Paul II's greatest contribution to the Church and the world is the realization that hate is not the opposite of love but rather objectification is. If love is wanting what is best for another person even if it requires sacrifice on my part then the opposite of that is using another person for my selfish pleasure even if that means hurting him or her.

Jesus at the end of His life looks down at us (in the person of John) and entrusts us to the most loving person that He can His mother. He looks at His dear sweet mother and entrusts her to the one person he knew would not hurt her John (and through him the Church). Is this not what parents who are dying do with their children? They do everything possible to make sure their love one is taken care of and thus they would never entrust a love one to someone who is so selfish that he would use another person for his or her own pleasure.

This beatitude while often focused on sexuality, I think goes deeper than that. May be I use someone as a punching bag because I am not willing to make the sacrifice necessary to get the help I need to control my anger or deal with my own feelings of self-hate. The way to happiness is to be love each person as a person and to never use another person for our own self desires.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
March 24, 2013
Spiritual Ponderings
Beatitudes and the Cross

As we continue to explore Archbishop Fulton Sheen's book: *The Cross and the Beatitudes: Lessons on Love and Forgiveness* as we explore the next two parts let us remind ourselves that many of the places that we have looked for happiness in the past have left us only more empty. Let us therefore allow the wisdom of God to enlighten us.

Beatitude: Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Seven Last Words: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

"At the beginning of his public life on the Hill of the Beatitudes, Our Lord preached: 'Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' At the end of His life on the Hill of Calvary, he now practices that poverty of Spirit by his Fourth Words from the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" begins Archbishop's Fulton Sheen's chapter on this beatitude and last words.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Archbishop Fulton Sheen defines the poor in spirit as: "The poor in Spirit are those who are so detached from wealth, from social position, and from earthly knowledge that, at the moment the Kingdom of God demands a sacrifice, they surrender all."

I see in the above list many of the causes for sin in our world. How many fights, large or small, have been started to protect one person or a group of people's wealth? How often do we make fun of others, point out others faults, or ignore other people in order to advance up the social ladder or at least keep from falling down? Even the pursuit of earthly knowledge can lead to sin. How many people became addicted to drugs and alcohol because they simply wanted to learn what those things were like? Is it not funny that we even call it "experimentation" as if we were in the search of knowledge?

Am I poor in spirit? It is something that I work on each and every day because who does not want to be wealthy, socially acceptable, and wise in the ways of the world. None of these things though will lead me to the true happiness that I am looking for. One last quote from Archbishop Fulton Sheen on this topic: "There is going to be a tremendous transformation of social position at the last day, for God, is no respecter of persons. Our social position in the Kingdom of God will depend not upon our human popularity or the popularity of propagandists, but only upon those things we carry with us in the shipwreck of the world—a clear conscience and the love of God."

Beatitude: Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.

Seven Last Words: I Thirst

"At the beginning of his public life on the Hill of the Beatitudes, Our Lord preached the necessity of zeal: 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.' At the end of his public life on the Hill of Calvary he practiced that Beatitude as there fell from his lips the cry of apostleship: 'I thirst,'" begins the fifth chapter of Archbishop Fulton Sheen's book.

The world is very foud about talking about religion, but dislikes doing anything with it. Many of us have grown up with "a fear of being identified wholeheartedly with the god for whom we were made." How many of us have a true desire to be known as a mystic (a person with a truly powerful prayer life with God that may or may not include visions)? How many of us want to be seen as social justice crusaders? Yes we don't mind helping with some charities sometimes but how many of us are ready to step up and be the next Mother Teresa? How many of us are willing to demonstrate to our families that faith is important by scheduling Sunday Mass during our vacations, praying the rosary as a family, or taking the time to further our own education by attending an adult education event at the parish?

Jesus does not thirst for water for "...they offered him vinegar and gall as a sedative for his sufferings he refused it. It was therefore not a physical, but a spiritual thirst that troubled him..." What did/does Jesus thirst for? He thirsts for us. Our God passionately desires to be with each one of us. He would rather die than live without us!!! Do you desire to be with God and if not why not? What is your image of God and what is preventing you from desiring to be with Him?



Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
March 31, 2013
Spiritual Ponderings
Beatitudes and the Cross

We are nearing the end of our exploration of Archbishop Fulton Sheen's book: *The Cross and the Beatitudes: Lessons on Love and Forgiveness*. I hope that these reflections have helped you in some way grow closer to the Lord this month. I hope that you are able to not only see the connection between the mystery of the Cross and the Beatitudes but also you have gained some insights that have helped you improve your relationship with the Lord.

Beatitude: Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Seven Last Words: It is consummated

"At the beginning of his public life on the Hill of the Beatitudes, Our Lord preached: 'blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.' At the end of his life on the Hill of Calvary, he practiced that Beatitude as, concluding a peace between man and God, he uttered the triumphant cry: 'It is consummated.'"

Connecting this Beatitude with this last word, which we not translate finished, brought new meaning to Jesus' death. If you think about any argument side A hurts side B and so side B in turns hurts side A. This keeps going until someone says enough it is finished and he or she refuses to retaliate for the hurts they have received. The war between God and man was now over and so of course when Jesus would rise from the dead and appear in front of the Apostles in the Upper Room He did not come seeking revenge but rather He offered them peace.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen in his eloquence wrote about it this way: "What is finished? War is finished! The war against sin! The war against evil! The war against God! The work of atonement, which is at-one-ment with God was complete. He has finished his Father's decade of the sorrowful mysteries, and the glorious ones were not about to begin. The last farthing was paid. The Treaty of Peace was signed: 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' And now that he has made peace he could cry in triumph: 'It is finished.'"

Beatitude: Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.

Seven Last Words: Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

"At the beginning of his public life on the Hill of the Beatitudes, Our Lord preached: 'Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.' At the end of his public life on the Hill of Calvary, he found that blessed comfort: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Archbishop Fulton Sheen goes onto explain how the beatitude of blessed are they who mourn is contrary to the Beatitude of the worlds: "'Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' The world never regards mourning as a blessing, but always as a curse. Laughter is the gold it is seeking and sorrow the enemy it flees."

There seems to be some logic to the world's beatitude. Who does not want to laugh and be merry? I know that I do. The weird thing though is that I have found the most profound happiness not running away from someone's sorrow but rather entering it to be with them. Reflecting on this paradoxical experience brought to my mind something that Fr. Henri Nouwen (one of my favorite spiritual writers) wrote in a book called: *Can You Drink the Cup?* It was: "For anyone who has the courage to enter our human sorrow deeply, there is a revelation of joy, hidden like a precious stone in the wall of a dark cave."

Once again the connection that Archbishop Fulton Sheen made between this beatitude and Jesus' final words brought new thought and insights into the passion narrative. The image that comes to my mind now when I hear "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," is that of a young man who falls back into the loving arms of his father. Another image that comes to mind is that of a soldier returning to his or her family. His or her spirit now belongs totally to their family now that the war is over. It is a moment of celebration. In much the same way the prodigal son returns to his father and places his fate in his father's hands. This is truly a time of celebration. The war against sin is over. Nothing will separate us from Christ. May we all simply stop fighting and commend ourselves to the Father.