

Meditating on the Beatitudes



by Deacon Reggie Bollich

The purpose of this paper is for the author to achieve a better understanding of how to pray meditatively.

The structure of this paper is written using the four classical elements of reflection; that is, reading from Bible text called 'lectio', speaking to God called 'oratio', meditation or thinking called 'meditatio', and contemplation or listening called 'contemplatio'.^[1]

'Lectio' (to read) leads to 'oratio' (to speak) leads to 'meditatio' (to think) leads to 'contemplatio' (to listen). Contemplative prayer is the end being sought. Sometimes we go directly from Lectio to Meditatio or Contemplatio as our prayer life starts to flow easier. Sometimes we may get to a point of Meditatio or Contemplatio and have to reverse to Lectio or Oratio again. There is no firm set direction of prayer."^[2]

Lectio

Read^[3] slowly and aloud the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12)^[4] provided below.

When one of the words or phrases in bold print, or one of the sentences, strike you, go to the subsequent, associated text; namely, **Poor in Spirit, Mourn, Meek, (Spiritual) Hunger and Thirst, Merciful, Clean (pure) of Heart, Peacemakers, Persecution**, then continue reading at that point.

¹ "When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² He began to teach them saying:

³ Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are they who **mourn**, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the **meek**, for they will inherit the land.

⁶ Blessed are they who **hunger and thirst** for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

⁷ Blessed are the **merciful**, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the **clean of heart**, for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are **persecuted** for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when they insult you and **persecute** you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.

¹² Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they **persecuted** the prophets who were before you."

Poor in Spirit^[5]

I may be materially independent but I may be as equally poor in spirit as a person who is materially deprived. Being poor in spirit, I know that being alone, by myself, is not enough. As

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a poor in spirit person I am needy and the need must come from deep within myself. I need the *gifts* of understanding, love, peace, and counsel. I also need sharing, guidance, a sense of direction, and inner growth.

During prayer I ask the Lord to come to my aid because I cannot fulfill my needs alone. My needs are deep so I invite the Lord to guide me in achieving the blessed *gifts* he promised. I am ready to exchange my pride for dependency so God can direct my daily life. My goal is to ‘seek the kingdom of God’ by bonding with the Lord in a deep relationship where within my heart I can live in his kingdom. I want the Lord to takeover my entire life leaving him to decide my material needs. I understand that while the material is perishable my spiritual treasure remains with me forever.

I must let go and trust God because, as a part of blessed creation, he loves me. I must remember not to cling to feelings of unworthiness because that may be just another subtle form of pride. The Lord does not offer to me the opportunity to enter his kingdom because I am worthy; he offers me the kingdom because he likes doing it, likes me, and wants me there with him so that’s the reason I can trust him. His love for me is unconditional; that is, ‘agape’ love.

With the focus of my meditation on the words ‘poor in spirit’ or the equivalent Aramaic word ‘anawim’ which literally means ‘little ones’ or the humble ones who give themselves to the Lord totally [6], I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

**My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear for you will never leave me to face my perils alone. [7]**

Proceed directly to the Oratio – Meditatio – Contemplatio section of this paper.

Mourn[8]

I can feel the pain of my personal sin but I can also feel the pain of the sin of others. I need to cry out, tearfully but without embarrassment, as Jesus did, allowing others to hear about the pain

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and anguish from which I suffer.

There can be numerous sources of sorrow in my life. Sorrow can come from a death, abandonment, divorce, or disappointment. All of these, or any disturbing change in my life, can cause grief. When I experience sorrow, it is driven by my ego; that is, having some relationship to one of my personal desires or to a personal expectation.

There are times when I get tired and become hopeless from grieving. When I get this way I must allow myself to feel *it* ...just feel *it* ...and quit fighting *it*. With a little prayer *it* will be lifted from me. Although an odd combination, I know that there can be joy joined with my sorrow simultaneously. This strange mourning I experience is blessed by God when I just let *it* be. Maybe I am saddened because I just did not get something I wanted. Maybe I am saddened because something was taken away from me. Maybe I am saddened because a significant number of years in my life are gone when I should have been to maturing and growing up.

I know that if I encourage my sorrow and grief it can damage me so I will not allow that to happen. I will not empower *it* nor will I permit *it* to overcome me. I will not cling to my guilt; rather, I shall discard guilt by “throwing out my ‘guilt-trophy’ from its case”.

I will soon learn that Jesus’ purpose of sorrow is to lead me to joy. I know that if I mourn freely joy will emerge because that is the way God made me so I will permit myself to feel sadness and I will cry when I need to.

With the focus of my meditation on the word ‘mourn’, I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, you wept over the death of Lazarus and said *Blessed are those who mourn*. Visit, we beseech you, with your compassion the homes and hearts of those who mourn the loss of their beloved one and may their hope in the resurrection sustain them in this hour of trial. [9]

Proceed directly to the **Oratio – Meditatio – Contemplatio** section of this paper.

Meek[10]

Relinquish control of my life over to Jesus and give up always having to be the winner. Focus on the love of Jesus letting his gentleness and tenderness seep into my heart. I want the strength to be humble just as the Lord was during his ministry and at the time of his death. To become his humble servant is at the top of my agenda because I know this is where real strength and power come from and it is one of God’s gifts to me. I need His help to be that rare person who can be calm, quiet, and gentle under attack. I can be that rare person by nurturing inner security in the form of gentleness and tranquility to make all violence unnecessary. First, I must shed layers from my ego and clear away the debris that has covered my perfection. Second, I must seek freedom from my own defensiveness, anger, clinging attitudes filled with anxiety, reconciled events that still rankle, determination of pay back what has happened to me. Third, I

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must let go of pride.

Meekness allows me to pitch the debris that covers my perfection. The foundation of meekness is a concealed safety that becomes mine when I provide a security to others, when I make a safe haven for others to relax and be themselves. I create security in myself and for myself when I offer to others a safe haven to be who they need to be. No other person can make me secure so I must take the first step to achieve it by stepping into the cycle of “giving-receiving-creating”; that is, I must “do something” for somebody. I must ‘give something to someone else. Once that first tiny step is taken I am on my way to wholeness and the cycle will merely ‘carry me around’.

With the focus of my meditation on the word ‘meek’, I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

Commit to the Lord your way; trust in him, and he will act.

He will make justice dawn for you like the light; bright as the noonday shall be your vindication.

Leave it for the Lord, and wait for him; be not vexed at the successful path of the man who does malicious deeds.

Give up your anger and forsake wrath; be not vexed, it will only harm you.

For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land.

Yet a little while and the wicked man shall be no more; though you mark his place he will not be there

But the meek shall possess the land, they shall delight in abounding peace. [\[11\]](#)

Proceed directly to the **Oratio – Meditatio – Contemplatio** section of this paper.

(Spiritual) Hunger and Thirst[12]

Above all else I want to focus on knowing God and understanding his will. I want to place simplicity and humility at the forefront of my thought and in front of earthly pleasure, social status, notoriety, financial and business success.

I have reached a point in my life knowing that my mere presence for one hour at Holy Mass on Sunday morning is not nearly enough to fulfill my personal relationship with Jesus. I now know I am called to holiness so I can live my life as Christ did. I want to imitate Christ in my life.

I have asked myself repeatedly ‘what do I want most in my experience and dreams.’ I have tried to live my answer and I have found that I am not fulfilled. Now I know that holiness is for everyone on a condition that I want it ... ‘like hunger and like thirst’.

Holiness cannot enter my mind, heart, and soul when my desire for money, jewelry, clothes, books, etc. is in overdrive. My desire for holiness must top my list of priorities. Jesus’ words about ‘entering the narrow gate’ to holiness rings in my ears and, while this is difficult, I’ll pray inviting goodness into my heart as a means to achieve holiness. I will also “do something” such

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as visit a sick person, help feed the poor, change my lifestyle, join the choir or a weekly prayer group, attend Bible study, attend 8:00 Sunday mass for myself then assist with babysitting at the 10:00 mass to help others.

With the focus of my meditation on the words ‘hunger and thirst’, I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

**As the blind longs for the running waters, so my soul longs for you, O God.
Athirst is my soul for God, the living God.**

When shall I go and behold the face of God?

**My tears are my food day and night, as they say to me day after day,
‘Where is your God.’ [\[13\]](#)**

Proceed directly to the **Oratio – Meditatio – Contemplatio** section of this paper.

Merciful[14]

I can share in the feeling of others and can walk with them in their pain, anguish, suffering, and loneliness. God gives to me sensitivity for the suffering of others and compassion to help them.

If I judge others then judgement will come back to me and the verdict I give to others will be passed to me in return. So it must follow that if I am merciful to others I will, in turn, receive mercy. This is how I can achieve peace of mind. I do not have to have an opinion about anything or anyone. Evaluating other people makes for insecurities in myself. When I learn how not to have an opinion and how not to evaluate others, I will begin to grow and receive.

The primary purpose of Christianity is forgiveness. In order to achieve total forgiveness I must not harbor vengeance of any kind in my mind and heart. I can choose to forgive or choose not to forgive; it is my decision.

With the focus of my meditation on the word ‘merciful’, I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

O God, whose only Son, Jesus Christ, underwent death so that in his own flesh he might conquer it, help me by meditating on his passion, death, and resurrection.

Help me to put aside my unholy fear of death and see it as the gateway through which I must pass in my journey to eternal life.

O Jesus, who during your prayer to the Father in the garden was filled with so much sorrow and anguish that your sweat became as drops of blood; have mercy on me. [\[15\]](#)

Proceed directly to the **Oratio – Meditatio – Contemplatio** section of this paper.

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Clean (or pure) in Heart[16]

I do not have to put on airs, a false front, and pretend to be something I am not so I can be completely honest with God and with others. I am now a dignified person and my life is marked with integrity.

With the focus of my meditation on the words ‘clean in heart’, I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

Proceed directly to the **Oratio – Meditatio – Contemplatio** section of this paper.

Peacemaker[17]

I do not allow anger and conflict to fester in my mind nor in my heart and I will deal with them constructively by keeping channels of communication open with others. I assist those who are near me in working out their differences without hurting one another.

With the focus of my meditation is on the word ‘peacemaker’, I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

**Lord, make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, I may bring love;
Where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;
Where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
Where there is error, I may bring truth;
Where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
Where there is despair, I may bring hope;
Where there are shadows, I may bring light;
Where there is sadness, I may bring joy.
Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted;
to understand than to be understood;
to love than to be loved.
For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life. [\[18\]](#)**

Proceed directly to the **Oratio – Meditatio – Contemplatio** section of this paper.

Persecution[19]

I know for whom and for what I am living and therefore willing to suffer and stand alone for what is right. I can take criticism without reacting defensively or feeling self-pity.

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With the focus of my meditation on the word ‘persecution’, I begin speaking to God using the following prayer:

Oratio – Meditatio - Contemplatio

Continue speaking[20] to God, pray from the heart, and experience being myself. Praise God for who he is. Give thanks for what I have. Ask for something (petition). Finally, forgive and beg forgiveness (contrition).

Commence meditation [21]; imagine the scripture (text) of the beatitude that I am focusing upon. Allow my senses to further imagine that I am there, with Jesus, on the Mount of Beatitudes. Find the moral in the beatitude and meditate on it. Find the meaning the beatitude as it applies to my eternal salvation.

Commence contemplation [22] by remaining very quiet and concentrate on the word or phrase that is the focus of my meditation. I must listen intently to God, remain patient, and let God do His work with me. I must not interfere at this point.

Endnotes

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- [1] Mark Link, Mission 2000: Praying Scripture in a Contemporary Way, (Allen TX, Tabor, 1993) 3
- [2] Brother Basil notes, St. Benedict Abbey, Covington, LA
- [3] ‘Lectio’, Brother Basil notes, St. Benedict Abbey, Covington, LA
- [4] The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990) 13
- [5] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 22-32
- [6] A Guide to Reading the New Testament, (Chicago IL, ACTA, 1986) 50
- [7] Thomas Merton, Prayer in Solitude, Abbey of Gethsemani. KY
- [8] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 34-38
- [9] The Catholic Prayer Book, (Ann Arbor MI, Charis, 1986) 202
- [10] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 40-56
- [11] Psalm 37 Verses 5-11
- [12] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 58-64
- [13] Psalm 42 Verses 1-4
- [14] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 66-78
- [15] The Catholic Prayer Book, (Ann Arbor MI, Charis, 1986) 269-270
- [16] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 80-86
- [17] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 88-92
- [18] St. Francis of Assisi Prayer
- [19] Marilyn Norquist, The Beatitudes (Liguori MI, Ligouri Press, 1981) 94-98
- [20] ‘Oratio’, Brother Basil notes, St. Benedict Abbey, Covington, LA
- [21] ‘Meditatio’, Brother Basil notes, St. Benedict Abbey, Covington, LA

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[\[22\]](#) 'Contemplatio', Brother Basil notes, St. Benedict Abbey, Covington, LA