



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: Lesson 3

THE BEATITUDES continued

Merciful and Loving Father,
Grief and sorrow bring us back to You, Lord, like little children who seek the loving arms of a beloved parent. In Your patience and in Your tender love You guide us to Your Son so that our wounds may be bound, and our sorrows healed when we unite our suffering with His—for it is through the precious blood of Jesus that we can be healed. Father, send our Advocate, the Holy Spirit to guide us in our study that we may understand the purification of the soul that comes from the sorrow of true contrition and repentance, and the comfort that comes from a soul cleansed with Your grace. We pray in the name of the Most Holy Trinity: God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO MOURN

“True, I was born guilty, a sinner even as my mother conceived me.” Psalm 51:7 [in some translations 51:5]

“I acknowledge my guilt and grieve over my sin.” Psalm 38:19

“So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you of two minds. Begin to lament, to mourn, to weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.” James 4:7-10

Note: In St. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation of the New Testament he placed *“Blessed are the meek”* second in the list of the Beatitudes. Jerome’s placement became the western textual tradition and all other western translations followed his placement. However, almost all other ancient manuscripts list *“Blessed are those who mourn”* as the second beatitude and the New American Bible translation adopts this order. The Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1716 also lists “those who mourn” as the second beatitude. In any case, the first three beatitudes result in placing us in the hands of God.

Matthew 5:4 ***“Blessed are they who mourn....”***

When we become “poor in spirit”, we admit we need God. We realize that we are insufficient without Him. “Poverty of spirit” expressed in childlike faith defines our relationship and brings us into the presence of the One True and Holy God. As we yield



to spiritual childhood admitting poverty of spirit, and kneel in His presence, the more clearly we see God. The more clearly we see God the more we become aware of our imperfections. We become humbled in His holy presence and we feel the burden of our sins. The result is that in becoming aware of our sins—we mourn our transgressions. To repent and feel genuine sorrow for our sins is a natural outflow of surrender to God through “poverty of spirit”. There can be no forgiveness of sin without true repentance. In 1 John 1:9 the Apostle wrote: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* We yearn to be purified in His presence and our cry becomes the cry of the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6: 1-5

Please read Isaiah 6:1-5

Question: What is Isaiah’s cry when he comes into Yahweh’s presence in the heavenly throne room?

Answer: He cries out *“Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”*

Question: What is the cause of Isaiah’s distress?

Answer: A sinful human being cannot come into the presence of a pure and holy God without feeling the painful burden of his or her sins upon the soul. The more clearly Isaiah saw God the more aware he became of his own sins.

Question: What remedy is offered to relieve Isaiah of this burden and his distress?

Answer: He is purified with a red-hot coal from God’s heavenly altar.

Question: How can Isaiah’s purification be compared to the purification of the soul that a believer receives in Purgatory? See 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; CCC# 1030-32; 1 Peter 1:7; 3:18-20; 4:6, 12; Ephesians 4:7-9; Matthew 27:52-53; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Maccabees 12:38-46

Answer: All who die in God’s grace who are assured of their eternal salvation but who still retain on their souls the stain of the guilt of venial sin from which they had failed to be purified in this life by an act of contrition deriving from an act of charity and performed with the help of God’s grace, or still retain the accountability for forgiven mortal sin must undergo purification so as to attain the holiness necessary to enter into the presence of the One True and Holy God. The Catholic Church has given the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect; from the Latin *purgation* meaning cleansing or purifying. In Purgatory the elect are purged by the fiery love of God as Isaiah is purified before entering God’s presence. Since he will be in essence the “mouth” or “voice” of God to the Covenant people his lips and mouth are purified with fire to prepare him not only for his audience with God but for his mission to Israel and Judah.



Question: What was John the Baptist's mission in preparation for the coming of the Son of God?

Answer: He called the Covenant people to the Baptism of repentance. In order to be able to come into the presence of God we must be purified of our sins. John's baptism prepared the people to come into the presence of God the Son.

Question: In sacred Scripture what was the first call to confession and repentance? What 3 questions does God ask and why? Please read Genesis 3:6-13.

Answer: Our first parents have fallen from grace in Genesis 3:1-7. It is the liturgical "hour" of communion between man and God when Yahweh comes to Adam and Eve in the afternoon in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are hiding, ashamed of their naked condition. No longer are they "clothed in grace", instead they have become disgraced and they are ashamed in their condition of sin to be in the presence of God. He asks them 3 questions:

1. "Where are you" [3:9]
2. "Who told you that you were naked?" [3:11]
3. "Why did you do such a thing?" [3:13]

God, being all-knowing of course knows the answers to all 3 questions but He is calling Adam and Eve to acknowledgement of their sin, to confession and to repentance. "Where are you" is not a question of physical location. God, being God knows exactly where they are hiding in the garden but rather it is a question concerned with their spiritual condition: "Where are you in your relationship with Me?" The second question establishes that they are no longer "clothed in grace" but have become "dis-graced".

God's reason for asking the 3 questions is to call His children to confession:

1. The first question, "Where are you?" calls Adam and Eve to an examination of conscience.
2. The second question, "Who told you that you were naked?" is a call for an admission of sin.
3. The third question, "Why did you do it?" is asking for repentance and the accountability for the sin committed.

These are questions God is asking each of us every time we come into His presence in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In his great homily on the Beatitudes St. John Chrysostom wrote about this blessing for those who mourn: *"And here too again He designated not simply all that mourn, but all that do so for sins: since surely that other kind of mourning is forbidden, and that earnestly, which related to anything of this life. This Paul also clearly declared, when he*



said, *'The sorrow of the world worketh death, but godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation....'*" [Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Homily XV.4]. In quoting St Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:10, St. John's point is that for the righteous to mourn sin is "godly sorrow" which counts toward salvation. Sorrow for sins the natural reaction to a supernatural call to cleansing and restored fellowship with God.

Consider the story of Simon Peter's encounter with Christ in the miraculous harvest of fish in Luke 5:1-11. After receiving John the Baptist's baptism Jesus had returned to the Galilee to begin His mission. It was early His ministry, before Jesus had called the disciples to follow Him, when Simon Peter and his partners, after a fruitless night of fishing, had brought their two boats into port and were in the process of washing their nets. Jesus hails the fishermen and requests that they take one boat out a little way from the shore so that He can address the crowds of people who had come to see and hear Him from the vantage point of Simon's boat. Simon and the other men with him had been fishing all night, as was the custom for fisherman on the Galilee. They were tired and probably hungry but they agreed to the young rabbi's request and taking Jesus aboard positioned the boat just off shore so Jesus could address the assembled crowd: *"After he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.'* Simon said in reply, *'Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.'* When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, *'Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.'* For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, *'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.'* When they brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him." Luke 5:4-11

Question: What is the difference between the rich young ruler's response to Jesus' call to follow Him in Matthew 19:16-22 and Simon-Peter's response in this passage?

Answer: Unlike the rich, young ruler, who was blinded by his self-sufficiency, Simon-Peter recognized that he was in the presence of God. The stunning realization brought him to his knees in repentance as he sincerely mourned his sins in the presence of the pure and holy Messiah and he was therefore able to give up everything to follow Jesus.

Question: At the conclusion of Peter's first great homily at the event of the second great Pentecost what does he tell the assembled crowd of Jews when they cry out to him in Acts 2:37-38 and why does Peter instruct them this way?

Answer: *"Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other Apostles, 'What are we to do, brothers?' 'Your must repent,' Peter answered, 'and every one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of*



your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” There can be no conversion of heart without genuine repentance.

But is it only our own sins that we should mourn?

Question: In the Isaiah chapter 6 passage [see verse 5] does Isaiah only mourn his own transgressions or does he feel an additional burden coming into God’s presence? Why?

Answer: He feels not only the burden of his own sins but the sins of the members of his community, *“Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips...”*.

St. John Chrysostom, the late 4th century Bishop of Constantinople writes concerning this blessing, *“But He bids us mourn, not only for our own, but also for other men’s misdoings. And of this temper were the souls of the saints: such was that of Moses, of Paul, of David; yea, all these many times mourned for evils not their own.”* [*Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, Homily XV.4].

Sin isn’t just personal sin. Every sin we commit adds to the burden of sin in our community and in the world. When we are obedient to the command of Christ to take up our cross and follow Him we unite our sufferings to Christ’s sufferings. To embrace our cross and mourn the world’s sins is to admit awareness and an intimate involvement in the suffering that sin brings to living things—man and beast alike. In our mourning we admit that our sins add to the suffering in the world. Even when our sins are forgiven there is still accountability for our part in adding to the collective damage of world wide sin. Our mourning of world sin is the recognition and shared responsibility for the fallen plight of humanity—sins of omission, sins of commission, accumulated sin, personal sin. Christ died that mankind might be delivered from all sin and therefore when we truly mourn our sin and the sin of the world we unite with Him in His liberating sacrifice that promises the end to all sin. We mourn, we offer penance which yields to redemptive pain in our suffering united with Christ and offered up to God—this is pain and passion that is transformed into **compassion** through the Passion of our Christ. This is an emptying of self in genuine mourning and sorrow for sins, but it is not grief, nor is it the level beyond grief which is despair. There is no despair in this mourning for this is the kind of mourning that welcomes comfort and love. The mourning that receives Christ’s blessing is a mourning that *“has seen mankind in its fallenness and nothing less will satisfy it than mankind fully restored.”* [*The Beatitudes: Soundings in Christian Tradition*, Simon Tugwell, page 69]. But in our mourning for the current sinful condition of mankind we have the promise of our Savior that on the day of His return all mourning and sorrow will cease.



“FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED”

“I will turn their mourning into joy, I will console and gladden them after their sorrows.”
Jeremiah 31:13b

“This is my comfort in affliction, your promise that gives me life.” Psalms 119:50

The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew makes three very interesting points concerning this promise [see page 448-49]:

1. The passive tense used is a “divine passive”. It is God who will comfort those who mourn.
2. The comfort God will offer is not a comfort that can be known in a worldly sense, but is instead supernatural in that this comfort will be fulfilled only by the coming of the Son of Man into His Kingdom.
3. It is not the mourning for mourning sake that will receive this divine consolation but God’s grace will come to those who mourn the suffering of sin.

Think of the tremendous implications of this divine promise. It is our Father's promise that the very hands that formed the cosmos and placed the stars in the heavens, the very hands that held the hand of Mary His mother when He was a little child, and the same hands that were stretched across a wooden beam in agony when the Roman soldiers nailed them to the cross; these same hands will wipe away our tears! The prophet Isaiah promises in Isaiah 25:8 *“He will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken.”*

And so in our mourning for sin we will be comforted—but there is more. The English word “comfort” is derived from the Latin word “cumfortare” (com-for-tar-ay). It is the root of the word ‘fortitude’, meaning *“that strength or firmness of mind or soul which enables a person to encounter danger or to bear pain with coolness and courage”* [The New Webster Dictionary]. So the promise is not just comfort in the sense of being held or sheltered, instead we have the promise that when we mourn our sins and turn to Christ that he will give us the strength and the courage to overcome our own weaknesses and inadequacies so that we can take up our own crosses and follow Him as He commanded in Mark 8:34-35 when Jesus *“summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.’”* This cleansing of repentance is what gave Peter and his companions the courage to leave behind every worldly possession to followed Jesus and after the Resurrection to take up their own crosses and to spread the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ across the known world. Not only does the



Holy Spirit comfort us in our sorrow and repentance but through living the Sacraments of our faith He gives us the strength to resist sin and also the strength to stand against sin in our community and in the world. We bear our suffering with a spirit of atonement, reconciliation and love and the result is comfort and strength.

Question: What recourse has Christ given us, in our earthly exile, to mourn our sins and to be comforted?

Answer: He has given us the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the sacraments as, *“The seven sacraments are the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the Church which is his Body”* CCC#774. The Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation requires the contrition of the penitent, a “sorrow of the soul” for the sins committed, and a resolution not to sin again [see CCC# 1450-54]. Through confession of our sins to Christ, in His presence and the presence of His visible representative—His priest, we place ourselves before God’s merciful judgment. In making an act of contrition we look honestly at our sins, and we take responsibility for those sins. Forgiven our sins, we are freed from our burden of sin, we are reconciled to God and reconciled to others, and through God’s grace we are comforted and are able to come back into full communion with the Most Holy Trinity and the Church. #1470 of the Catechism assures us: *“In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, anticipates in a certain way the judgment to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin. In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and ‘does not come into judgment.’”* Our Savior gives us the same assurance in John 5:24: *“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life.”* Having made a sincere act of contrition for our sins Christ, through His priestly representatives, forgives our sins and comforts us with the knowledge that we emerge from His presence as pure as a newly Baptized baby. This is the miracle of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In exhibiting “poverty of spirit” we enter into spiritual childhood in our relationship with God the Father. Drawing closer to Him we see Him more clearly and become aware of our sins. We sincerely mourn our sins and the sins of the world and as a result of our sincere repentance He comforts us, His children, and strengthens us in the struggle against sin and evil in the world.

Question: Who does Jesus promise to send to provide this comfort, to give us instruction, to strengthen our faith and to give us the assurance of God’s love? See John 14:15-31



Answer: Jesus promised this comfort through God the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and our Comforter: *“If you love me you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you and will be in you. [..]. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”* John 14:16-17, 25-27

Question: Does Jesus’ promise of comfort mean that all our troubles will disappear?

Answer: The promise in this beatitude is not that when God comforts us in our sorrow that our troubles should all go away. If that was the case people would only use God as a “magic rabbit’s foot”, turning to Him only out of their desire to be free of the problem and not out of love for Him. In this promise, being comforted also means receiving strength, encouragement, and hope to deal with what is causing our sorrow. The more we suffer we can be assured that the more God gives us comfort and strength if we seek Him. And, it is Jesus’ promise that as we suffer He suffers with us.

Question: Are we to only be concerned with our own comfort or are we obliged to offer comfort to others who mourn and suffer? Read what the Apostle Paul, who had been known as Saul of Tarsus before his conversion, wrote about this subject in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 and relate this passage to the blessing for those who mourn and the comfort they are promised.

“Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ’s suffering overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow. If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement.”

Answer: Yes, we are obliged to offer His comfort to others; His mercy and love given freely to us must flow from us to others in need of comfort, mercy and love. We are the conduit through which His mercy and love flow out to the world.

Question: Can you think of any servants of Christ who were examples of this Christian call to give Christ’s comfort offered in mercy and love to others?

Answer: There are many wonderful examples but both Mother Terese of Calcutta and Pope John Paul II are two excellent examples of this outpouring of the love of Christ.



Question: St. Paul had first hand knowledge of suffering for Christ. He also received a lesson in how Jesus viewed suffering in his first encounter with Christ. How is Christ's suffering with His Church expressed in Jesus' question to Paul when he was known as Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus? Why is Jesus' question to Paul/Saul significant? How is this encounter connected with the 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 passage? See Acts 9:1-6 for Paul/Saul's first encounter with Jesus Christ.

Answer: In this passage Saul of Tarsus, who was an officer in the Jewish court called the Sanhedrin, had been persecuting Christians in Judea and was being sent to Damascus, Syria to arrest more Christian families. In his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, Jesus asks Saul, "*Why do you persecute me?*" When Saul [Paul] inquires who is it who is speaking to him Jesus replies, "*I am Jesus, **the one you are persecuting.***" [Acts 9:4-5]. It is significant that Jesus is not asking "Why do you persecute my Church?" Instead, Jesus' question to Saul implies that when the early Christians suffered persecution that Christ suffered with them. In the passage from 2 Corinthians Paul is also telling us that we are obliged to take what we have learned from our experience of suffering and as an agent of God to offer comfort to others who have suffered. In this way we take on the suffering of Christ as we experience afflictions in service to Christ's ministry.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Jesus: "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*"
Matthew 11:29-30

"Now, Moses himself was by far the meekest on the face of the earth." Numbers 12:3

The first step on the stairway to eternal life in "poverty of spirit" acknowledges God's sovereignty over your life, and your complete dependence on Him places you in child-like faith before the throne of God. Face to face with a pure and holy God, you mourn your sins and the sins of the world. The first step identifies your relationship to God and the second refines you with the purifying fire of repentance. It is the third step, "blessed are the meek" which renews you and places you as a useful tool in the hands of the Master of the universe.

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

The Greek word *praus*, [pronounced prah-ooce'], means mild, humble, or meek. The word *praus* only appears four times in the New Testament: three times in Matthew [5:5; 11:29; 21:5] and once in 1 Peter 3:4. In both Matthew 11:29 and 21:5 Jesus Himself is called "meek" just like the prophet Moses before Him [see Numbers 12:3]. In addition to



the passage in Matthew 5:5 *“Blessed are the meek..,”* this Greek word for “meek” is used in:

Reference	Passage
Matthew 11:29	<i>“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.”</i>
Matthew 21:5	<i>“Say to daughter Zion, ‘Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”</i>
1 Peter 3:4	<i>“...but rather the hidden character of the heart, expressed in the imperishable beauty of a gentle [meek] and calm disposition, which is precious in the sight of God.”</i>

This is another Greek word which Christians gave a uniquely Christian character, with “meekness” becoming the symbol of a higher Christian virtue as illustrated in these three verses. The pre-Christian Greek culture meaning of this word expressed an outward conduct as relating to only men, and not necessarily in a positive light [see Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament volume I, page 37]. Christians, however, gave the word a quality expressing an inward virtue that is related primarily to God. Christian “meekness” is based on humility which is expressed in the New Testament as the supernatural quality that is the outgrowth of a renewed nature. This renewal can only come when we surrender our lives to God and seek His divine will in our lives. To the pagan Greeks this word often implied condescension, but to the Christian this word implies submission of the human will to the will of God. This submission is, however, not an indication of weakness. For the Christian, submission to God’s control results in strength—strength that is not our own but the strength that comes from God’s will working through our lives. The Bible is full of stories of God intervening in the lives of men and women who call on Him for His help and of stories of men and women willing to help others, but there are very few examples of God intervening in the lives of those who prefer their own plan and destiny except in cases where His intervention is judgment to bring about redemption.

In the Old Testament book of Genesis God preserved the “promised seed” of Genesis 3:15 by selecting Abraham and his wife Sarah to be the parents of the family from which King David, Mary of Nazareth, and Jesus the Messiah would come. Yahweh made a 3-fold Covenant with Abraham promising him land, descendants, and a world wide blessing. At first the question of her fertility had probably not concerned Sarah. She was beautiful; a woman desired by kings [Genesis 12:15; 20:2] and promised by God to the mother of a nation. However, as the years passed she began to be concerned that God’s plan needed a little help and so in her desire for a child and in her pride she



offered her husband her Egyptian slave girl, given to her by the Pharaoh of Egypt. If her husband impregnated her slave girl the child born of the union could be her child [Genesis 16:1-2]. This was a common custom practiced in Mesopotamia, the Levant, and in Egypt at this time. Unfortunately, this was not God's plan. In Sarah's unwillingness to submit herself to God's plan her infertility continued and the child born of this union would become a source of tension and unrest within the family as Sarah continued to age.

Please read Genesis 18: 1-15: **The Theophany at Mamre**

Question: Who is it who comes to visit Abraham and Sarah at Mamre? What is their appearance? See Genesis 18:1-2

Answer: It is Yahweh accompanied by two others; all have the appearance of men.

Question: What is the purpose of Yahweh's visit to Abraham and his wife?

Answer: The principle purpose for the visitation to Abraham at Mamre is to announce that at this time next year the child that was promised in Genesis 17:15-16 will be born to Sarah. The text notes that Yahweh is accompanied by two "messengers". What makes this passage so unique is the use of the singular and plural in addressing the three visitors. In this passage Abraham addresses the 3 "men" **in the singular** and yet they reply **in the plural**. For example:

- Abraham: *"He looked up, and there he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and bowed to the ground. 'My Lord [singular], he said..."* Genesis 18:3
- The three men: *"They [plural] replied, Do as you say."* Genesis 18:5c

In these 3 men, whom Abraham addresses in the singular, many of the Fathers of the Church saw a foreshadowing of the mystery of the Trinity. The representation of the Trinity as three angels sitting around a table with the Oak of Mamre, a foreshadowing of the cross, in the background is seen frequently in Eastern Rite Catholic iconography.

There is a humorous exchange between God and Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18:12-15. Upon hearing the announcement of the birth of a son in a year's time Sarah laughs to herself, repeating her husband's laughter in Genesis 17:16. When Yahweh asks Abraham *"Why did Sarah laugh"* she tries to deny laughing because she is afraid. But He is the God who knows everything from our most intimate thoughts to the hidden motives behind our actions. In this passage Yahweh is not only reading Sarah's thoughts, He is interpreting her statements by restating her thoughts in His exchange with Abraham. First He restates Sarah's thoughts in verse 12 *"Now that I am past to age of childbearing, and my husband is an old man is pleasure to come my way again?"* ; which God relates as, *"Am I really going to have a child now that I am old?"* in verse



13. Notice that Yahweh interprets Sarah's thoughts about her husband's age and reshapes it into a statement about her age which is the physical hindrance to the birth of a child. Finally He goes beyond her actual thoughts to the intent of those thoughts in His rhetorical question: *"Is anything impossible for Yahweh?"* Yahweh has overcome the physical impossibility of the fulfillment of the promise through Sarah.

Question: But why did Sarah laugh? Does God rebuke her for laughing?

Answer: God does not rebuke her. Can her laughter indicate that she has suddenly realized that the "joke" is on her? In her old age she had given up trying to conceive a child. She had finally yielded herself to God and the result amazed her. In her old age she would bear the promised heir! What was impossible for woman was possible for God when that woman yielded in meekness to the will of God.

Question: What was Yahweh's reply to Sarah's denial?

Answer: Yahweh's reply to Sarah's denial is *"Oh, yes you did!"* If Sarah had any doubts about the identity of their visitor she is now convinced. With Abraham and Sarah God has a holy couple who will become the parents of a holy people, a holy people who will be called to be the Old Covenant Church, Israel, whose mission will be to become witness to the world of the One True God and through whom God will fulfill His plan to bring forth the Messiah.

Another saint who needed to learn that meekness leads to strength was Simon Peter. St. Peter had physical courage, leadership, and faith but he did not have humility. His denial of Christ three times after Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane was not a crisis in faith but it was a crisis in expectation—the expectation of Peter's plan verses God's plan. Jesus had been preparing His disciples and Apostles for His Passion and death. The first prediction of His death was given shortly after Peter is chosen as His Vicar of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth in Matthew 16:21-23. The last prediction of His Passion was given before leaving the Upper Room the night of the Last Supper in Matthew 26:31-35.

Question: What was Peter's response to the revelation of God's plan in these two passages?

Answer: In the first revelation of God's plan Peter rejects Jesus' warning and is rebuked. In the last revelation Peter professes his devotion to Jesus and his willingness to die for Him.

Question: Does he make good on his boast? See Matthew 26:69-75

Answer: No, he denies Jesus 3 times and wept bitterly in his humiliated state.

His failure results in Peter being stripped of all those attributes that made him a leader. In denying his Master 3 times he was stripped of his courage, his self-confidence, and



his self-worth and was left humbled and broken. But he emerged from his covenant ordeal strengthened in his faith and humbled—in his repentance meekly submitting his life entirely to God. His lesson in humility made him a far better leader of the New Covenant people. The pain of his failure would give him a servant's heart and a genuine compassion for the sinners he would lead to Christ. This remarkable change is evident as he takes up his leadership role on the birth of the Church at the second great Pentecost which is related in Acts chapter 2. So transformed was Peter into the humble servant of Christ that he did not fail his final test in his willingness to die for his Savior a little less than 2 decades later, as related in the History of the Church by the 4th century Bishop Eusebius when Peter's meekness was transformed into real strength and courage in submitting himself to the will of God.

There is also a very moving story told in the 2nd century apocryphal *Acts of Peter* that in fleeing Rome along the Via Appia, during Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians, that Peter and his wife came face to face with Christ. Shocked to see his Savior on the way to Rome Peter asks of Jesus, "*Domine, quo vadis?*", "*Lord, where are you going?*" According to the ancient account, Jesus stopped, looked intently at Peter and responded, "*I am going to Rome to be crucified.*" It was when Jesus made this statement that Peter understood it was time for the prophecy to be fulfilled that Jesus had made to him after the Resurrection, nearly forty years earlier. On the shores of the Sea of Galilee Jesus had told Peter, "*'Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.'* He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him [Peter], '*Follow me.*'" [John 21:18-19]. Peter immediately took his wife by the hand and returned to Rome. His wife was martyred first. St. Clement, disciple of Peter and 4th Bishop of Rome after Peter, records "*They say, accordingly, that when the blessed Peter saw his own wife led out to die, he rejoiced because of her summons and her return home, and called to her very encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, and saying, 'Oh thou, remember the Lord.'* Such was the marriage of the blessed, and their perfect disposition toward those dearest to them." [St. Clement, disciple of Peter and 4th Bishop of Rome, from the *Stromata*, VII.II]. When he was taken by the Romans soldiers to face his crucifixion, St. Peter, Vicar of the King of Kings requested that he be crucified upside down since he was not worthy to be crucified as his Master had died. Yes, the big fisherman had learned meekness and total submission to the will of his Lord and God and the result was the courage to embrace death in the name of His Savior. [See Origen's account of the martyrdom of St. Peter, (Origen, d. circa AD230), as quoted by Bishop Eusebius in *History of the Church, Book III, chapter I*]. Also see *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Jerome, (d. AD420), pg. 363; Tertullian, (d. circa AD220), in *De Paraescript. Haeret.*, chapter 36; and *The Acts of Peter*].



We could have no better example of Christian meekness than the example set for us by the very first Christian—the very first human person to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God.

Question: Who was that person, clothed in grace and humility who submitted in perfect obedience to the will of God?

Answer: Mary of Nazareth, the Mother of God the Son. From the first moment of the angel Gabriel's announcement that of all women born, she had been chosen to bear the "promised seed" [Luke 126-38], to Simeon's prophecy of her suffering [Luke 2:33-35], to witnessing her Son's Passion on the Cross [John 19:26], Mary submitted herself completely to God plan for her life. The Fathers of the Church saw her as the model Christian. St. Irenaeus praises her above all women when he writes, *"Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. [...] The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith."* [St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III.22.4]. And comparing her humility and obedience with Eve's rebellion and disobedience St. Jerome writes of her, *"Death through Eve, life through Mary."* [St. Jerome as quoted in the Catechism #494]. In the Old Covenant God the holy Ark of the Covenant was God's presence with His Covenant people. In Mary's "yes" in meekly submitting herself to God's plan she became the Ark of the New Covenant, her womb became the first Eucharistic tabernacle, and her travels to visit Elizabeth her cousin and her journey to Bethlehem, became the first Eucharistic processions. Pope Benedict XVI expressed this dimension of Mary's meekness in her submission to God his homily on June 1, 2005: *"In a certain way, we can say that her journey was—and we are pleased to highlight this in the Year of the Eucharist—the first Eucharistic procession of history. Living tabernacle of God-made-flesh, Mary is the Ark of the Covenant in whom the Lord has visited and redeemed His people. Jesus' presence fills her with the Holy Spirit....Is not this too the joy of the Church, that incessantly welcomes Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and carries Him to the world with the testimony of assiduous charity permeated by faith and hope? Yes, to welcome Christ and to take Him to others is the true joy of Christians! Dear brothers and sisters let us carry on and imitate Mary, a deeply Eucharistic soul, and all our lives will become a Magnificat."* Pope Benedict XVI, June 1, 2005

God always seems to weave the unexpected into His plan. In His plan it isn't the proud or the strong that conquer and claim the reward of kneeling before the King of Kings—it's the meek and the humble who are the victors and their victory comes upon their surrender to the will of the Most High God.

Question: Who was it, other than St. Joseph that God first chose to give the privilege of bowing down in adoration to His Son? Was that first delegation composed of kings or priests?



Answer: No, shepherds—the dregs of Jewish society who lived in a state of such ritual impurity that their testimony wasn't even accepted in a Jewish Law court. It is the meek and lowly that God exalts because they know they need God. In the case of the Shepherds of Bethlehem, the meek were kneeling before the one only the meek are privileged to see—the meek were kneeling before the Christ.

And in yielding in meekness to the plan of God working in our lives we are promised ...

FOR THEY WILL INHERIT THE LAND

“God’s servants shall dwell in the land and possess it; it shall be the heritage of their descendants; those who love God’s name shall dwell there.” Psalm 69:36b-37

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 25:34b

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time.” 1 Peter 1:3-5

The first beatitude places us before the throne of God. The second purifies us and the third places us in the hands of the Master as we submit in meekness and humility to His will and His plan for our lives. There are two ways to interpret the promise associated with this blessing. Bible scholars both ancient and modern have seen in this blessing an allusion to Christ's victory in breaking of the power of Satan over the earth. The first beatitudes to Adam and Eve were the blessings of fertility and dominion over the earth [Genesis 1:28]. In our original parent's Fall from grace, Satan began to usurp and pervert these blessings. The blessing of sexual union between a man and a woman was given as a gift by God to be applied only in the context of covenantal marriage. In marriage a man and a woman are given the extraordinary possibility to become co-creators with God in the birth of the next generation. Abuse of this blessing has led to sin and suffering. Satan also usurped man's dominion over the earth. In Jesus' defeat of sin and death on the Cross, Satan's control over the earth and his power to dominate the earth has been thwarted. No longer does Satan have the power to dominate us because we have been reborn through our baptism into the family of God. We belong to the God who created and dominates the earth, and as His children and his heirs we inherit the earth. CCC # 299: "...for God willed creation as a gift addressed to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him."



Some scholars look to a connection between the promise of the meek inheriting the land and Psalm 37:11, which in most English translations seems to be a repeat of this promise, *“But the meek [anawim = economically poor and disadvantaged] shall inherit the earth (land).”* Psalm 37:11. The Hebrew word which is usually translated as “meek” in the Psalm passage, however, does not have the same force and character as the Greek word, *praus*. The Hebrew word is *anawim*. In his book *The Beatitudes, Soundings in Christian Tradition*, Dr. Tudwell points out [page 31] that the Hebrew word *anawim* is not primarily used in a moral context [as the Greek word *praus*, is used in a moral context in its Christian interpretation. In Jewish society the *anawim* were the economically poor who lacked political power and social influence; the disadvantaged for whom those blessed with wealth and positions of civil and religious authority were responsible. The *anawim* are the “poor” Jesus addressed in His Sermon on the Plain in Luke chapter 6. It is for this reason that I do not see a strong connection between this promise which addresses the “meek” who yield themselves to God’s will and the disadvantaged “poor”, *anawim*, of Psalm 37:11 who are promised social justice in the next life.

As mentioned there is another theological and scriptural way to view the promise of “inheriting the land” made to the “blessed meek” who yield their lives as tools in the hands of the Master. In relating this passage to the Old Testament “the land” is probably a more accurate translation than “the earth”, and the New American Bible translation reflects this interpretation [the same Hebrew word is translated as both “land” and “earth”]. In the Old Testament references to “the land” refer to the Promised land of Israel [Numbers 20:12] which became a Biblical “type” for heaven, as the inspired writer of Hebrews relates in Hebrews 11:9-10 speaking of Abraham’s obedient journey from Ur of the Chaldees [Genesis 11:28; 15:7] to Canaan [Genesis 12:4-5]: *“By faith he sojourned in the Promised Land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God.”* [also see Revelation 21:10-11].

In Biblical interpretation it is always helpful to start with the literal interpretation as understood by the original recipients of the Biblical teaching.

Question: How did the disciples and Apostles understand this promise of “the land” to the “blessed meek”?

Answer: The 1st century Jews and Israelites were looking for the restoration of “the land” of Israel as promised by the Old Testament prophets as it would be established in the Messiah’s kingdom on earth and the home of the faithful Covenant people—the New Covenant people as prophesized in Jeremiah 31:31-34. As a Biblical “type” of God’s kingdom this promise can not only be seen as the promise of heaven—a promise already given in the first beatitude, but it can also be seen as a promise of the inheritance of the earth through the “new Israel” which the Messiah is prophesized to



establish—the promised 5th everlasting kingdom of Daniel chapters 2 and 7. This is what most 1st century Jews and Israelites had been praying for.

Question: How is it that the promise and the prophecy of Daniel chapters 2 and 7 have been fulfilled?

Answer: The promise of this beatitude and the Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in the Universal Church as the “new Israel”, the earthly home of the Covenant people until they leave this exile for their home in heaven. We, as the New Covenant Children of God are the inheritors of this “land”, the “new Israel” of the Universal/ Catholic Church [*catholic* means universal], a world-wide kingdom that carries the world-wide blessing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the invitation of His gift of salvation to every nation on the face of the earth!

Questions for group discussion:

Question: Read Hosea 7:14 and 2 Corinthians 7:9-11. What two types of mourning are being described here and what is the difference?

Question: What is the difference between “mourning” and giving in to “despair”? Why is to despair a sin? See CCC# 2091

Question: In our study St. John Chrysostom differentiated between “godly sorrow”, in mourning one’s sins, and “earthly sorrow”: *“And here too again He designated not simply all that mourn, but all that do so for sins: since surely that other kind of mourning is forbidden, and that earnestly, which related to anything of this life. This Paul also clearly declared, when he said, ‘The sorrow of the world worketh death, but godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation....’”* What is the difference between “godly sorrow” and the “worldly sorrow that leads to death”? These passages will help you with your answer:

- St. Catherine of Sienna concerning *“...those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them: everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind.”*
- St. Sir Thomas Moore to his daughter shortly before his martyrdom: *“Nothing can come but that that God wills. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best.”*
- Romans 8:28: *“We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”*



Question: When we meet those who are suffering how can we become agents of God in giving comfort? Discuss how we can be effective in offering the love of Christ to comfort others.

Question: Describe a situation you have encountered where you have received or given comfort.

Question: How often do you “mourn” your sins? Do you submit yourself to an examination of conscience daily? Why is a daily examination of conscience a spiritually healthy exercise?

Question: How often do you go to confession? What is the minimum requirement for this sacrament? See CCC# 1422-1470; & 2042.

Question: As inheritors of “the Land”, as understood to be the earthly kingdom of the “new Israel”, the Universal Church, what are our covenant obligations as the inheritors of this promised blessing? Can you say with confidence that you understand your covenant obligations as an inheritor of these blessings? Where can you go to learn more about your Catholic faith?

Answer: The Catechism of the Catholic Church, books by orthodox Catholic authors like Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger [Pope Benedict XVI], Dr. Scott Hahn, Jimmy Akin, Steve Ray, etc.; websites like www.catholicanswers.com; Catholic publications like Catholic Answers Magazine, This Rock, Envoy, Catholic Laywitness, etc.; EWTN television, to name only a few of the excellent resources that are available.