

ASH WEDNESDAY



COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:1–3a

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying: “Blessed...”

When Creator Sets Free (Jesus) saw this great crowd, he went back up into the mountainside and sat down to teach the people. His followers came to him there, so he took a deep breath, opened his mouth, and began to share his wisdom with them and teach them how to see Creator’s good road. Creator’s blessing rests...

THE WORD “BLESSED” comes from an attempt to translate Hebrew and Greek biblical terminology into Old English. Those who spread Christianity to the early English speakers searched for a native English term that captured the same sense of those Greek and Hebrew words, and found the Old English word, *bloedsian*.

Bloedsian referred to something set apart and marked for sacred or holy purposes, but more literally, it referred to something sprinkled with the blood of an animal sacrifice. This sacrifice, offered to a god, was holy, and its blood was used to sacred spaces. So, while *bloedsian* does refer to a thing made sacred, we might more directly translate it to modern English as “blooded.”

Our normal association with the word “blessed” is far less striking. “God bless you,” and “bless your heart” are common phrases, sometimes used almost automatically. Even in the Church, our liturgies often end in a blessing: “The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always,” and we may hear it simply as a formality to end a liturgy.

Because it is so familiar, we risk allowing blessedness to become banal or a social nicety. I don’t think that’s Jesus’s intention in using the word. It’s true that in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the word we translate as “blessed” does not have the same origin in the sprinkling of blood. But it’s equally true that these languages represent cultures that were very familiar with that practice. And the New Testament writers are ever willing to draw connections between sacrificial animals and the sacrifice of Christ.

Most obviously, Jesus, the Lamb of God—a sacrificial lamb, whose blood is shed—is a central image of the New Testament. The Church continues to employ this image in its liturgy, theology, and music, both ancient and modern. Living in this image, we get the sense of being with the saints in Revelation brilliant white garments are cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb takes away sin through blessing, by cleansing with its sacred blood. Of this blood, the Letter to the Hebrews offers a line I find especially evocative: “...you have come...to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the

ASH WEDNESDAY CONTINUED

sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” This blood of Jesus—unlike the blood of Abel, unlike the blood shed of our human violence—speaks at last a word not of cursing, but of blessing.

As we read and pray through Jesus’s famous Sermon on the Mount, we see one of the most well-loved parts of the Gospel. But if we only understand “blessedness” as something sweet, or formal, or a banal Bible-ism, we risk losing something. When we hear of blessedness, our heart should beat a bit faster, our souls should quicken, we should be alert, excited, maybe even uncomfortable. There is a holy strangeness to an encounter with true blessing. As we continue through the Sermon, we should keep two things in mind.

First, we are talking about approaching God. We are talking about nearness to and encounter with the One in whom all have their being. We are talking about piercing the veil, seeing some glimpse of eternity. Blessedness isn’t just nice; it’s the stuff of death, and life.

Second, the lesson of this Sermon is that such a breathtaking, soul-quickenng encounter is not reserved for a separate elite. The blessedness of the God who made all things can be found in all things, through our reverence, our respect, our awe of all that God has fashioned. The blood poured out for you, for all the world, has been sprinkled upon the world. In this Sermon, behold, this blood speaks a better word; listen!

Br. Lucas Hall
Society of Saint John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT



COLLECT

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:3

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Creator's blessing rests on the poor, the ones with broken spirits. The good road from above is theirs to walk.*

I OFTEN STRUGGLE to pray.

This may be a strange admission from a monk. I am so rich in so many ways: responsibilities, relationships, interests. I am rich in so many ways, and I feel my poverty distinctly when I am invited to set all of that aside and be with God in prayer. I feel the poverty of my own divided attention, of competing goods pressing in on me, of fears and anxieties for myself and for the world.

Above all, I feel the poverty imposed on me by my own expectations: that I need to meet God in a certain way, in “correct” language, showing only my best self, as if God didn’t know everything already.

I often struggle to pray—and in that struggle, I have become acutely aware of Jesus’ words to those who are “poor in spirit.”

The word used for “poor” in this passage from Matthew’s Gospel does not include what we would call the “working poor”—laborers hustling to make ends meet and put bread on the table. Rather, the word refers to those who are utterly destitute and dependent on the goodwill of others: those who must resort to begging for their daily bread.

The “poor in spirit,” then, are those whose spiritual lives—whose relationship with God—are in a state of utter dependence, crying out for mercy.

Jesus invites us into the incredibly uncomfortable place of noticing and naming where we lose control, where we lack resources, where we feel most adrift. Jesus calls us to gaze at that place and enter it.

Two examples from Scripture help to illustrate this.

First is the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee from Luke’s Gospel. Jesus draws a contrast between the Pharisee, who trumpets his own riches, his accomplishments and righteousness: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income” (Luke 18:11–12).

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT CONTINUED

We are all formed—by our families and peers, by our culture—to focus on how we are doing well. All our incentives push us to present a strong face to ourselves, to the world . . . and to God. The Pharisee in the parable may be proud, yes, but proud in a way that is utterly normal for how we have learned to operate in the world.

The tax collector, by contrast, shows humility before God: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). A despised agent of the Roman state, the tax collector nevertheless is honest in gazing at his own poverty of spirit and naming it before God.

What is holding you back from a similar honesty before God? What of the world and its expectations do you cling to as you stand before God in prayer?

And second, Jesus himself. Jesus calls us to stand before God in our poverty, and he provides the model. Saint Paul writes to the church at Philippi that Christ Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . . And being found in human form, he humbled himself” (Philippians 2:7, 8).

Jesus meets us and shows us what it means to stand before God in the poverty of our creatureliness. This can be a scary place. But Jesus assures us that we aren’t alone there.

In his own humility and obedience, in his Passion and death, Jesus shows us that whatever poverty afflicts us, however we find ourselves without resources or support, in all those places we fall short, Jesus is there with us, standing with us, crying out with us, giving us strength to know that what we face now is not all there is for us. As we begin to walk through Lent with Jesus, he invites us to turn our gaze onto our own poverty and utter dependence, to name it and own it before God. In doing so, Jesus assures us that we will know and have the promises of the kingdom of heaven.

Br. Lain Wilson
Society of Saint John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA



BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT DETAIL | JEN NORTON

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT



COLLECT

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Creator's blessing rests on the ones who walk a trail of tears, for he will wipe the tears from their eyes and comfort them.

JESUS' PROMISE in this beatitude has sustained and given solace to the bereaved down the ages. God's consoling presence in the face of death and the pain of loss is assured.

The Greek word used here, *pentheó*, is multivalent in expression: to mourn, to lament, to grieve whether for loss, pain and suffering, or in repentance. Mourning is a cry of the heart that turns to God for help, healing, and hope. It encompasses both the personal and the communal in expressing profound sorrow, giving emotional, spiritual, physical voice to human struggles.

Jesus' own passionate expression of sorrow and grief is directed toward God in his public tears mourning the death of his friend and joining in lament with his friends and loved ones (John 11:28–35). Jesus fully embodies and expresses God's own sorrow as he weeps over Jerusalem for the sin and suffering which destroy its peace (Luke 19:41–44). Jesus prays with a yearning for God's presence during difficult times and in confidence that God is always present to our cries. On the cross, Jesus' vulnerability and pain expressed in lament are transformed through his compassion into strength and consolation in death.

The promise of comfort for us who mourn is not only emotional but also a spiritual assurance that God walks alongside us in all circumstances as Jesus did. To mourn with God is to know God's comfort.

The Greek *paraklethésontai* translates "will be comforted" implying that those who mourn, grieve, and lament will be strengthened (English *com-fort*, with strength) with God's consolation to endure and see the transformation of their grief. The Greek verb also includes the sense "to call to one's side." Our honest outpouring of mourning and lament—acknowledging our vulnerabilities and need of God—itself becomes the *means* of our experiencing God's *ever-present* compassion, support and healing in our times of sorrow. We are strengthened in our weakness as God's power is made known.

'Lord who throughout these forty days / for us didst fast and pray, / teach us with thee to mourn our sins, / and close by thee to stay.' Claudia Frances Hernaman (1836–1898)

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT CONTINUED

Mourn, grieve, and lament with Christ this Lent, so that comfort, strength, and hope may be brought near. Seek to be drawn into the loving healing of God, to be freed from self-centeredness, and to experience Christ's presence *now*—that it may be imparted to others—participating in Jesus' passion, death, and rising to new life.

Br. Jonathan Maury
The Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA



INVITED BY LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

Long

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT



COLLECT

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:5

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Creator's blessing rests on the ones who walk softly and in a humble manner. The earth, land, and sky will welcome them and always be their home*

IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY, Aidan, a monk on Iona in Scotland, was sent to establish a monastery on Lindisfarne in northern England. Like Columba who led much missionary work out from Iona, Aidan led great evangelism from Lindisfarne.

Aidan sent monks out, two by two, into the neighboring villages and countryside. He gave two noteworthy instructions: First, travel on foot, not horseback. Second, do not carry a knife or any sort of weapon for defense. Travel then was very dangerous, so this was remarkable.

Aidan instructed ways to live like Jesus, not simply speak about Jesus. Walking instead of riding, they went like their neighbors, as equals instead of with additional power and privilege. Without weapons to fight, they resisted violence with vulnerability. Aidan and the monks embodied the gospel, and they were well received. Offered humbly and meekly, good news spread quickly.

“Humble” and “meek” are similar and from the same word in Hebrew. Humility is a lowliness, not thinking too highly of oneself. Meekness is a gentle, strong patience waiting and seeking justice. When Jesus taught that the meek will inherit the earth, he was quoting Psalm 37.ⁱ The Book of Common Prayer puts the “lowly shall possess the land” (verse 12), where many translate it “meek” and a few “humble” will “inherit the earth.”

Psalm 37 says that amid prospering and violent evildoers, we are to trust, take delight in, and commit our way to the Lord who cares, upholds, and provides. Such strong patience includes not fretting, being jealous of or enraged by those who “succeed in evil schemes” (verse 8). The meek know and focus on the long view. As the psalmist says: “For the power of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous” (verse 18).

Scott Bessenecker wrote: “The reason that the meek will inherit the earth is that they are naturally disposed to use power in the way it was designed by God to be used—as a guard for the weak and to preserve the common good—in contrast to those with MONOPOLY™ power, who consolidate wealth and status in a single set of hands at the expense of everyone else.”ⁱⁱ

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT CONTINUED

Gentle and strong patience does not mean giving in or giving up. The meek are not weak. They use power, often choosing restraint and downward mobility, surprisingly for good. Jesus showed love and leadership by riding a donkey, not a stallion, and by washing feet. Aidan and monks, traveling on foot without weapons, boldly lived and shared the good news.

Consider how you feel the push today for more profit and prestige. Who has modeled meekness for you personally or historically? What might be an invitation to trust God more now with gentle, strong patience? Looking to Jesus who demonstrated love feet first, how might you practice being vulnerable and meek? Ask for the imagination to use your power, including with restraint, for guarding the marginalized and furthering the common good. Like Aidan, may you live the gospel.

Br. Luke Ditewig
The Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA

ⁱ Scott A. Bessenecker (2009) *How to Inherit the Earth: Submitting Ourselves to a Servant Savior*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p23.

ⁱⁱ Bessenecker, p15.



MERCIFUL MOTHER | JESSICA JANE LYNCH

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT



COLLECT

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:6

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Creator's blessing rests on the ones who hunger and thirst for wrongs to be made right again. They will eat and drink until they are full.*

WHAT DOES it look like to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and what does Jesus tell us about how those desires will be fulfilled?

Food and water are essential to life. When our bodies demand nourishment, the impulse to eat or to drink comes from deep within, at the very core of what makes us human. In this Beatitude, Jesus invites us to recognize another vital hunger: the longing for belonging and love, as expressed through right relationships. This way of right relating is what scripture calls *righteousness*.

The English word *righteousness* may evoke a courtroom image and legal judgement. But in the Hebrew scriptures that shaped Jesus' life and teaching, the word had a more expansive relational meaning. Righteousness as signified by the Hebrew word *tsedaqah* expresses right relationship with God, with neighbor, and with creation. It is not only about right and wrong, but about seeking equity, harmony, and the flourishing of all. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to ache for the world to be restored to its intended order as a networked community of care where all are fed and no one thirsts.

Jesus returns to the image of hunger and thirst several times throughout the gospels. In John 4, Jesus meets a woman of Samaria at a well. She has come to the well to draw up water for her household's daily needs. Jesus asks her for a drink, then tells her about the living water he has to offer, saying "those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty" (John 4:14). At first, the woman is eager for literal water, but she then realizes that what Jesus offers will quench her deeper thirst for inner healing and restored relationship with her community and with God. Through Jesus, her longing for righteousness is fulfilled.

Several chapters later in John 6, a hungry crowd finds Jesus, hoping that he will replicate the previous day's miraculous feeding of 5,000 people with only five barley loaves and two fish. When Jesus tells them about bread from heaven, they ask him to give them this bread, eager for physical nourishment. Jesus responds, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). Again, Jesus offers something that satiates a deeper hunger, that offers satisfaction beyond the physical.

The Beatitude's promise, "for they will be filled," is not the promise of a one-time satiation through a drink of water or a meal of barley loaf and fish. It is an invitation to right relationship with God, with neighbor, and with creation through following Jesus. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for the message of righteousness that Jesus brings to the world.

Br. Jamie Nelson
The Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA



• THE BEATITUDES •



KELLY LATIMOR - THE BEATITUDES

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT



COLLECT

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Creator's blessing rests on the ones who are merciful and kind to others. Their kindness will find its way back to them—full circle.

IF SOMEONE is begging you for mercy, you know exactly what they mean. We all have a gut sense of what the word “mercy” means even if we have a hard time defining the word. Mercy is hard to explain; but Jesus was clear about the importance of mercy. The problem most of us have, including myself, is figuring out how to practice mercy in our day-to-day lives.

The good news is that we all have plenty of God-given opportunities to practice mercy. Sometimes these opportunities to practice mercy will be obvious. Situations like forgiving a resentment, giving someone the benefit of the doubt, or having patience with someone you disagree with are obvious opportunities to practice mercy. Other times, these opportunities to practice mercy will be subtle. For example, not getting angry at bad drivers or letting go of your pet peeves. The important thing is that we do not waste these opportunities.

In my own life as a monk, when I contemplate mercy, I usually start with a feeling. I try to feel in my heart as richly as I can what it would feel like to be more merciful. I ask myself what it would feel like to be more generous, more compassionate, more forgiving, and more understanding of how I perceive the faults of others. When I do this contemplative exercise, I always feel a lightness in my spirit. I feel an expansiveness in my heart and a sense of joy that I want to share with others.

It might help to think of mercy as being contagious. Normally we use the word contagious to describe something bad that can be spread from one person to another but try considering the word contagious in a positive light. Try to imagine the mercy you feel inside as being contagious to all those around you. Try to imagine how much more peaceful the world would be if we could all spread a little bit more mercy each day of our lives.

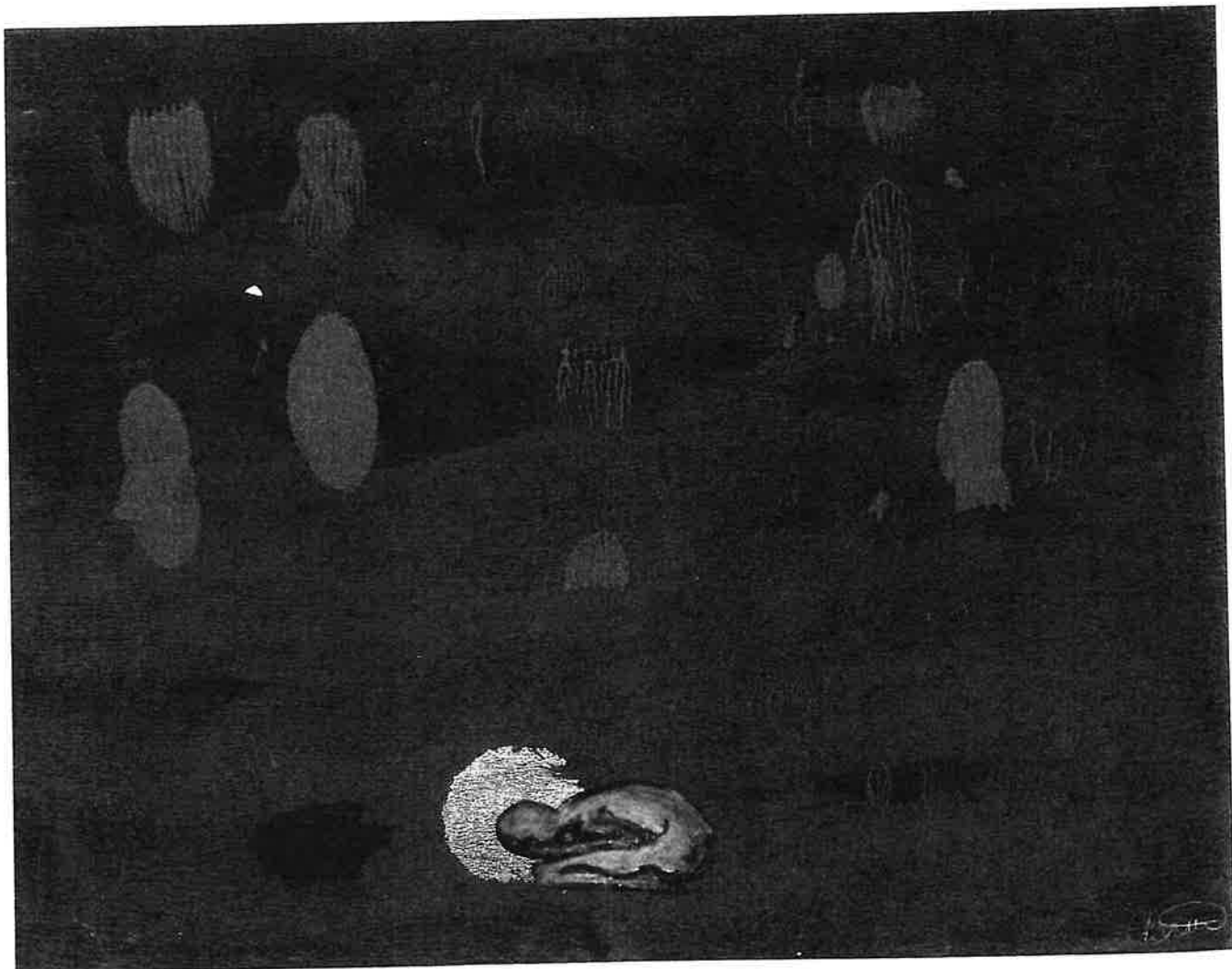
I do my best to take that feeling of contagious mercy and apply it to my life. I consider how I can be more merciful to others, especially in my thoughts towards them. Personally, I find being merciful in my words and actions towards others to be much easier than being merciful in my thoughts!

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT CONTINUED

I also try to be more merciful to myself. I try to pay attention to how I am talking to myself and ask myself if I have neglected to apply that feeling of mercy inwardly as well as outwardly. Of course, this is all easier said than done, but as I said before, God gives us so many opportunities for practice.

If you ever feel stuck in your journey with mercy or wonder why it is important, consider how merciful Jesus was in his earthly ministry. Think of all the time and energy he spent healing the sick, practicing patience with those who reviled him, and calmly teaching the truth to all who came to him. Jesus was also a merciful leader with his apostles as they squabbled amongst themselves, misunderstood what he was saying, and even abandoned him. Jesus kept coming back to mercy again and again throughout his earthly ministry. We must do the same. Above all else, remember that God is with us on our journey with mercy. Our most merciful God has our back. We can always fall back on the mercy of God.

Br. Jack Crowley
The Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA



DEPIHS | CARMELLE BEAUGELIN CALDWELL

SUNDAY OF THE PASSION—PALM SUNDAY



COLLECT

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Creator's blessing rests on the pure of heart. They are the ones who will see the Great Spirit.

THROUGHOUT HEBREW SCRIPTURE, the heart stands for the hidden essence of our humanity. The soft or tender heart is receptive to wisdom, spiritually pliable, agile: it can bend, turn, and change. The hardened heart is defiantly unreceptive. It is no longer made of flesh, but of stone. It has calcified by its own volition, choosing itself over God.

In his own teaching, Jesus elaborates upon the heart-wisdom of his ancestors. In his parables and sayings, the heart is a source of good or bad treasure. It is soil that receives seed. It is the arena of our inmost thoughts, imagination, & faith. The heart is an abode for the indwelling Holy Spirit given to us.

For his disciples, Jesus is the heart of the God we worship, and in Jesus this God has a human heartbeat.

What Jesus calls a *pure heart* is an icon of this humanity in right relationship with God. This pure heart is alive to itself and therefore rooted in a real interior life. And it is alive with compassion and connection to others, created in God's likeness. Each mysterious creature is endowed with their own miraculous heart, different from our own, yet fashioned by the same Maker and set on fire by the same Lover.

But *pure* can be a hard word to swallow. Did Jesus not name and denounce a fixation with purity in the dominant religious culture around him? Purity cultures in the church look suspiciously Pharisaical, imposing impossible and often inhuman ideals. Sadly, they often end up driving sincere disciples (or would-be disciples) away from the God of mercy. The *Rule of the Society of St. John the Evangelist* offers words I find helpful, about purification in relation to the mystery of Christian prayer: "Our love must be purified and tested by many times of darkness, loss, and waiting" (Chapter 21). Of course, you don't have to be a monk or nun to know what this is like. Any serious disciple learns soon enough that making decisions based on the gospel will set us at odds with neighbors, employers, politicians, or even friends or family; that there will be seasons when prayer is clouded by distraction, boredom, or the agony of feeling nothing; that the confident trust we felt when we entered upon a vocation or made a vow will be shaken in ways great and small. There is a purity God grants in and through our patient, faithful endurance, but it is more akin to *integrity* or *wholeness* than an immaculate conscience.

Blessed are those *distilled to their essence* by the ups and downs of sticking with Jesus: collected, recollected, concentrated, condensed, made real, and offered up to God upon the altar of the heart.

SUNDAY OF THE PASSION—PALM SUNDAY CONTINUED

When the response to God's love that we call prayer becomes the center of who we are, many other dimensions of our carefully manicured and cherished self-identities fall away. With each layer, a new response of freedom is possible. And a new vista of God's infinite love opens before our astonished and tearful eyes.

What do those eyes see?

More of God than we thought possible, it seems. On the whole, the Hebrew scriptures agree with God's words to Moses in Exodus 33:20: "You cannot see my face, for no one shall see me and live." Yet seeing God—however partially or imperfectly—would become a major Christian image for the transfiguration of our spiritual perception, begun in this life and coming to fullness in eternity.

What opens our eyes—and what those eyes see—is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is seeing with the eye of a purified heart. Tradition has come to call the fullness of this sight in the bliss of heaven the *beatific* (or "happy-making") vision. It is fitting that the term for this consummation of our spiritual seeking and beholding shares a root with the word beatitude. Both teach us where true joy is to be found, and how.

Br. Keith Nelson
Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA



DAY OF THE LORD | HANNAH GARRITY

EASTER DAY

COLLECT

O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Creator's blessing rests on the ones who make peace. It will be said of them, "They are the children of the Great Spirit!"

THERE WAS "PEACE" in Jesus' day. It was called the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome, and it was the product of the Roman Empire using its superior military force to beat down its opponents to the point that they were no longer able to resist. It was a "peace" that was *obtained* and *maintained* by violence. Jesus lived in Roman-occupied Palestine and was well acquainted with the *Pax Romana*. He saw how the Romans maintained this "peace" by dominating their subjects with brute force. Roman peace relied on daily intimidation, quick and cruel punishment (including crucifixion), and the constant threat of retaliation and destruction. Resistance to Rome was met with crushing violence.

This was not the peace which God had promised, nor was it the peace the prophets envisioned. That peace was *shalom*, and it meant wholeness, safety, and well-being for an individual or a group. *Shalom* extended beyond the mere absence of conflict. It was a gift from God, representing completeness in one's relationship with God and harmony in one's relationships with others. *Shalom* is what Jesus was offering when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 14:27). *Shalom* overcomes our anxieties and fears with a deep and abiding calm that results from placing our whole trust in God.

The peace that comes from God is a gift, but it is also a peace for which we can and **must** strive. Jesus blesses the *peacemakers*, which goes beyond those who simply *enjoy* peace to those who **actually** work for peace. *Peacemakers* are called "the children of God" because their peacemaking reflects the generosity and benevolence of God, who "makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

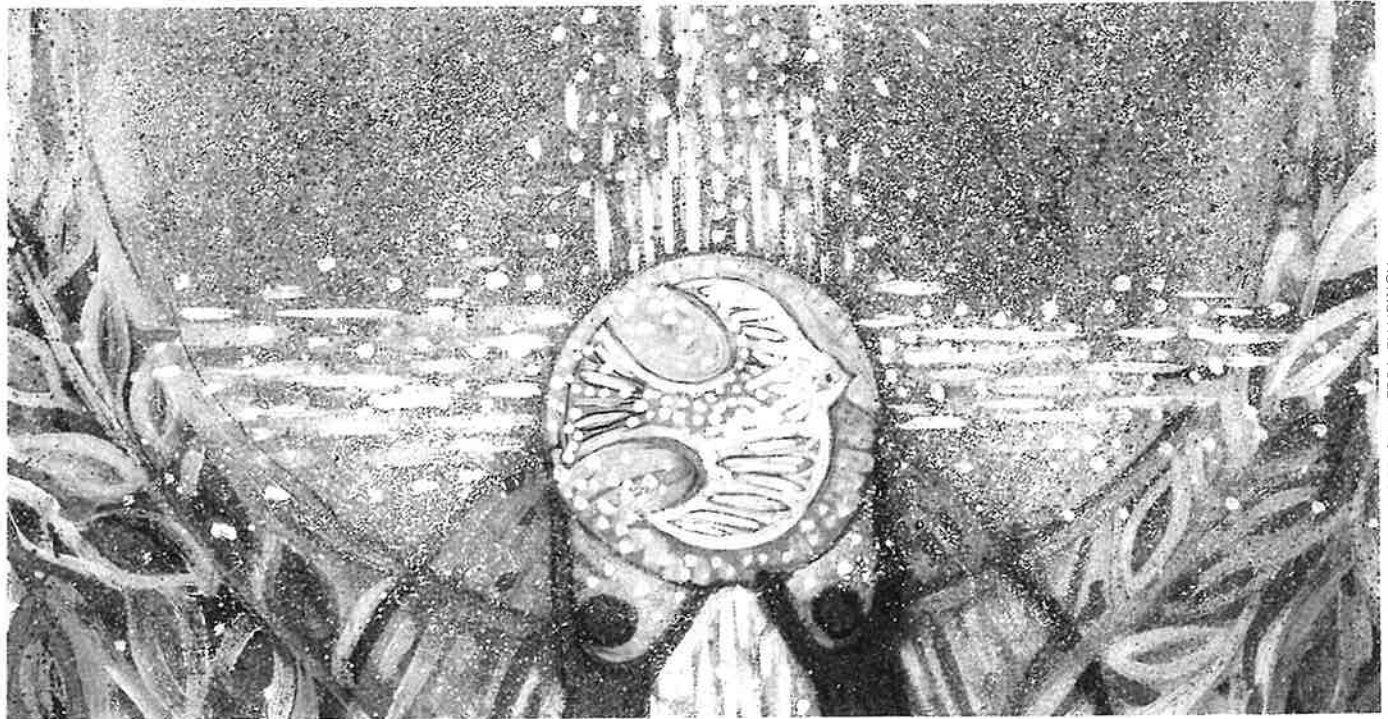
There is a difference between "*peacekeepers*" and "*peacemakers*." *Peacekeepers* are those who seek to maintain peace by avoiding conflict. They typically downplay tension between individuals or within a group to maintain the façade of peace. They will sacrifice their own inner peace to keep others happy. *Peacekeepers* hate rocking the boat and are uncomfortable with discord, so they do their best to steer clear of conflict.

Peacemakers, on the other hand, are those who are willing to resolve both outer and inner turmoil to establish peace with others and within themselves. Inevitably, peacemaking requires engaging in conflict and tension to help bring the situation to a solid resolution. Peacemaking is active, engaging with differences to find resolutions, while peacekeeping is passive, keeping things as they are by separating parties or smoothing things over.

Jesus was and is a *peacemaker* who embraced our human condition, confronting and overcoming the power of evil that enslaved us, speaking the truth with compassion, and offering us a lasting, authentic peace, a peace that the world could not give. When God raised him from the dead, God vindicated him and proved for all time that God's strength is greater than human strength, that God's love can and will prevail over human hatred, that God's wisdom and truth is everlasting. The peace that God gives is true peace, not the false peace that is obtained and maintained through power and violence. We can choose to live in that victory during this Easter season (and beyond) and challenge ourselves to be peacemakers, actively addressing the conflicts and tensions that arise between humans and offering compassion and understanding and real solutions that enable us to move forward.

Receive God's peace, share God's peace and work for God's peace in this season of joy and victory.
Shalom!

Br. David Vryhof
The Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA



DETAIL FROM BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS | JEN NORTON

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 5:10–12

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Creator's blessing rests on the ones who are hunted down and mistreated for doing what is right, for they are walking the good road from above. Others will lie about you, speak against you, and look down on you with scorn and contempt, all because you walk the road with me. This is a sign that Creator's blessing is resting on you. So let your hearts be glad and jump for joy, for you will be honored in the spirit-world above. You are like the prophets of old, who were treated in the same way by your ancestors.

“The Bad News Precedes the Good News”

WHAT IS the “back story” to Jesus’ Beatitudes? Jesus was surrounded by a culture of duplicity and oppression. Earthly powers were misaligned to Jesus’ mission of mercy. The Beatitudes offer us a deep encouragement; however, they do not promise an intervention from suffering. Our encouragement is threefold.

First, the promise of Christ’s companionship. When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death—which we may do more than once in this life—we are not left alone. Jesus is God Emmanuel, God with us. Saint Catherine of Sienna endured a terrible time of physical suffering when she felt abandoned by Jesus. After a miraculous recovery, she had this agonizing question for Jesus: “Where were you when my heart was so tormented?” She heard Jesus respond, “I was in your heart.” And so for you. Jesus will make good on his promise that he is with you always. You are not alone in the best of times and in worst of times.

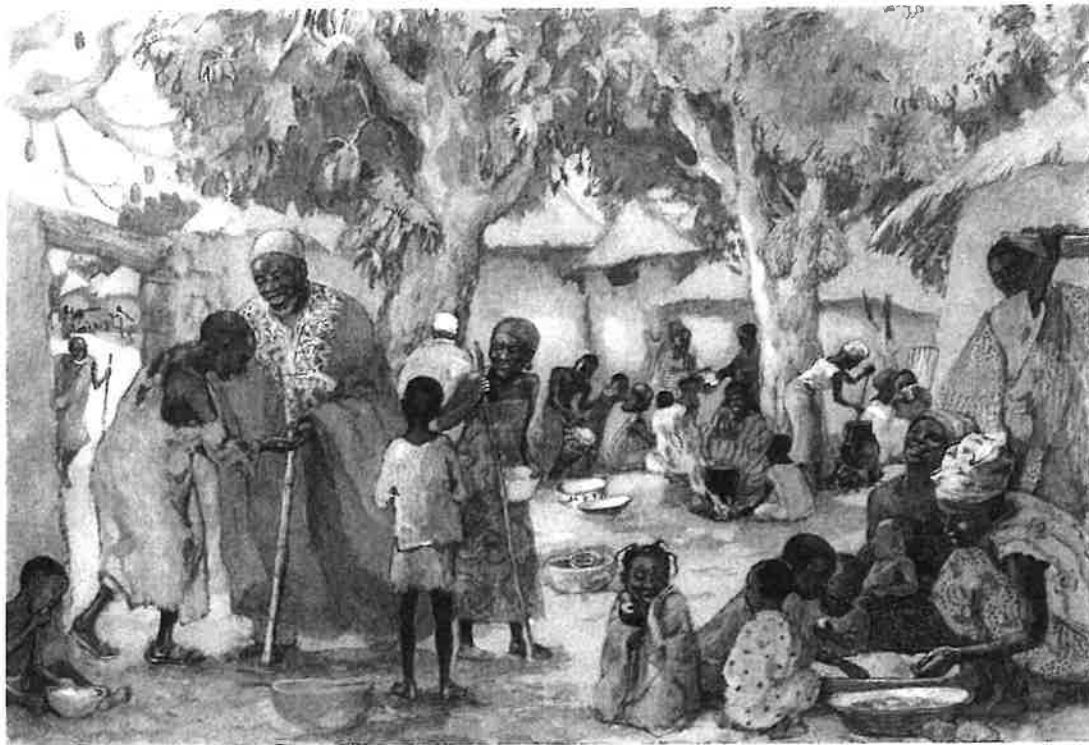
Secondly, we cling to the gift of hope. We do not hope for what we can see. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We stand in life at midnight; we are always at the threshold of a new dawn.” Cultivate God’s gift of hope by drawing from your own memory how you have survived, even thrived, to this day. You are probably a walking miracle. Saint Paul prods us with the encouragement to “hope against hope.”

Thirdly, we hear Jesus’ promise that God’s blessing is forthcoming. Will we know the fullness of God’s blessing in this life? I don’t think so. We will need the healing of death and the perspective of eternity

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER CONTINUED

to realize how God's blessing has formed our whole life. In the meantime—and we are now living in a very mean time—we co-operate with God who so loves the world. Be especially attentive to those who captured Jesus' own heart: the least, and last, and lost. In this life, they will know Jesus' promise of blessing through us. And we will know Jesus' promise of blessing, if not now, then forever in the life to come.

Br. Curtis Almquist
The Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge and West Newbury, MA



THE POOR ARE INVITED IN | JESUS NAIFA