

Session 2: Poor in Spirit

What We Found

The first beatitude is the foundation the rest are built on. Behind "poor in spirit" stands the Old Testament's *anawim*: the humble and lowly who, having nothing else, lean entirely on God (Zephaniah 2:3; Psalm 34:18). Jesus announced his whole mission from Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue: good news to the poor, fulfilled "today." Matthew's "poor in spirit" and Luke's "you poor" guard each other: dependence, not destitution, is the blessing, and the kingdom already belongs to the emptied, its fullness still to come. We also tested the prosperity reading at full strength and found it breaks on Calvary.

Voices of the Church

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · DE BEATITUDINIBUS, AS QUOTED IN CCC 2546

The Catechism, at 2546, quotes St. Gregory of Nyssa on this beatitude: "The Word speaks of voluntary humility as 'poverty in spirit.'" Gregory reads the first beatitude as humility freely chosen, in imitation of the God who freely became poor.

Application (ours, not the saint's): the first step of the ascent: nothing can be climbed by a hand that will not first let go.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM · HOMILIES ON MATTHEW

St. John Chrysostom, preaching through Matthew in Antioch, teaches in substance that the poor in spirit are the humble and contrite of heart, and that Christ set this beatitude first deliberately: pride was the first sin and the root of the rest, so humility is laid as the foundation of the whole edifice. Where pride toppled even angels, the lowly heart stands secure.

Application (ours, not the saint's): the order of the Beatitudes is itself a teaching. No one hungers for righteousness, shows mercy, or endures persecution well who has not first been emptied.

ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX · STORY OF A SOUL; ACT OF OBLATION TO MERCIFUL LOVE

St. Thérèse of Lisieux's "little way" is a sustained enactment of this beatitude: remaining little, expecting everything from God as a child expects everything from its father, and coming before him, as her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love prays in substance, with empty hands. She did not trust her own accumulated merits; she trusted his mercy.

Application (ours, not the saint's): poverty of spirit is not self-hatred. It is the relief of finally telling the truth about where the money comes from.

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:3 and add it to Matthew 5:12a from last week.
- Make one act of generosity this week that actually costs you something, and tell no one.
- Pray the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) once this week, slowly.
- Read Matthew 5:4-5 before Session 3.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:3

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

Catechism References

CCC 544, 2544-2547

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:4-5 and notice which two beatitudes Session 3 will hold together.