

Cor Gathering
Saturday, 29 March 2025
The Cross and the Beatitudes

This Gathering is a reflection of the book, *The Cross and the Beatitudes*, by the Venerable Servant of God, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. In the book's introduction, Archbishop Sheen writes:

"THIS little book is a correlation of the Seven Beatitudes and the Seven Last Words. The eighth beatitude, in the language of Saint Thomas Aquinas, 'is a confirmation and a declaration of all those that precede. Because from the very fact that a man is confirmed in poverty of spirit, meekness, and the rest, it follows that no persecution will induce him to renounce them. Hence the eighth beatitude corresponds in a way to all the preceding seven.'"

He further states that there is no direct one to one correspondence between the Last Words and the Beatitudes. He states that the only similarity is that, 1) there are seven of each, and 2) the sermons were both delivered on a mountain top. The Beatitudes were delivered at his first public sermon while the Last Words were stated at the very end.

It should be noted that this book was first published in 1937 when Monseigneur Sheen was teaching at Catholic University.

Opening Prayer

Sister Miriam James Hyland

Jesus, we love you. And we thank you for this time of Lent.

We thank you for what the desert reveals, Lord. We thank you for your faithfulness.

We thank you for going before us always. And Lord, we know that you do not reveal anything that you don't wish to reveal.

So, we offer to you all that's been raised up to our hearts these days together. And we ask that you continue to bring all of the parts of our hearts and lives to yourself.

Jesus, I pray that you would cover us in your precious blood, that you would defend us against any and all attacks of the enemy.

Holy Spirit, come, come fill us with light. We just pray that you would reveal to each one of us whatever we need to know today when we need to know it.

We surrender to you. Father, I pray that you would father us as your children.

And Mother Mary, oh Mama, we love you.

You are so beautiful, and you are so kind. And you are the one who comforts those of us in affliction.

And you never leave us, Mama. So I just pray that today in this time, you would intercede for each one of us. And we pray all of this through your holy name, Jesus,

Amen.

The First Word

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

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Archbishop Sheen was a fervent anti-Communist, and he often compares the Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem to the Soviet Communists of his day. “The anger of the Communist or violent man is based on selfishness; he hates the rich not because he loves the poor in spirit, but because he wants to be rich himself... “Selfishness is the world’s greatest sin; that is why the world hates those who hate it.”

Let us reflect on this passage:

When they swore to kill him, he did not use his power to strike dead even a single enemy; and now on the Cross, meekness reaches its peak, when to those who dig into the hands that feed the world, and to those who pierce the feet which shepherd souls, he pleads: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Which is right—the violence of Communism and other systems of persecution or the meekness of Christ? Such violence says meekness is weakness. But that is because it does not understand the meaning of Christian meekness. Meekness is not cowardice; meekness is not an easy-going temperament, sluggish and hard to arouse; meekness is not a spineless passivity which allows everyone to walk over us. No! Meekness is self-possession. That is why the reward of meekness is possession.

- Cite some examples in our society today where “meekness” corresponds with “weakness” along the complete disrespect of the meek.
- Cite some examples of disrespect of the meek, in Jesus’s time and in other periods in history.
- So, what is the “Land” that the meek inherit?

For home meditation:

- Archbishop Sheen refers to the passage of Matthew, Ch 11 v12,” “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.”

- What does this passage mean to you? Feel free to look up various interpretations, including any notes that are part of your bible.

The Second Word

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

This day you shall be with me in paradise.

Archbishop Sheen wrote, “The very word ‘mercy’ is derived from the Latin ‘miserum cor,’ a sorrowful heart. Mercy is, therefore, a compassionate understanding of another’s unhappiness.

- Let’s discuss this viewpoint with regard Jesus’s act of mercy from the Cross.
- In our study of the Divine Mercy (April 2024 Cor), how did Saint Faustina describe Jesus’s greatest desire (as he told her) as well as his greatest “disappointment.”
- How does Jesus fulfil the beatitude with his Second Word?
- Consistent with this theme, what does Jesus expect from us?

The Third Word

Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.

(Son) behold your mother, Woman, behold your son.

Archbishop Sheen’s description of the world in 1937 does not seem to be much different from now.

The world is living today in what might be described as an era of carnality, which glorifies sex, hates restraint, identifies purity with coldness, innocence with ignorance, and turns men and women into Buddhas with their eyes closed, hands folded across their breasts, intently looking inward, thinking only of self.

It is just precisely against such a glorification of sex, and such egocentrism which is so characteristic of the flesh, that Our Lord reacted in his third Beatitude: “Blessed are the clean of heart.”

He succinctly states,

...for it is the purity of Our Lord that made the gift of his Mother possible. This is the one supreme lesson to be drawn from this word, namely, that Mary became Our Mother because her Divine Son was purity itself. On no other condition could he have given her to us so completely and wholeheartedly.

- Why does Archbishop Sheen write that “purity” is so important with the fulfillment of the Third Beatitude?
- What role does marriage play in the achieving of purity for us “mere mortals”?

For your meditation at home: How do you interpret this final paragraph of the passage?

Purity, then, is not selfishness; it is surrender, it is thoughtfulness of others, it is sacrifice. It can even reach a peak where the Mother of Jesus can become our mother. Away then with that false maxim of the world which tells us that love is blind. It cannot be blind. Our Lord says it is not blind. “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see”—see even God. Mary, open our eyes!

Jesus, I surrender myself to you. Take care of everything!

The Fourth Word

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

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

What does it mean to be “Poor in Spirit?”

- How were the Holy Family “poor in spirit?”

How did Archbishop Sheen describe God’s abandonment of Jesus?

For meditation at home: How do you address Jesus’s statement and how should we live our lives accordingly, “Amen, I say to you, that the publicans and the harlots shall go into the Kingdom of God before you.”

The Fifth Word

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

I thirst.

Archbishop Sheen often refers to “the world.” What does he mean by that term?

- “The world cannot understand either this Beatitude or this Word, for the world by its nature is seated in indifference.”
- The world that dislikes zeal for God’s justice, first hated it in him. It was his zeal that brought him to the Cross. The world loves the indifferent, the mediocre, the ordinary, but it hates two classes of people: those who are too good, and those who are too bad.

What did Jesus tell his disciples about the world despising him?

How can we interpret this statement:

- Converting souls to Christ, then, is not based on the pride of propaganda, but on a desire for perfection... the Christian propagandizes to increase the happiness of others. He wants to bring souls to Our Lord for the same reason he wants to see the sun shine, the

flowers bloom, and lambs grow into sheep—because it is their perfection and therefore their happiness.

How about this one? Who says that Evangelization is hard?

Just suppose that that one zealous believer the first year converted one unbeliever to Christ and his Church. Suppose that the next year these two each made a convert; then there would be four the second year.

And suppose the next year, these four made one apiece next year, then there would be eight converts at the end of the third year. Now how many would there be, from that one zealous believer, at the end of only thirty years? There would be in the communion lines of the church at the end of the thirtieth year, one billion, seventy-three million, seven hundred and forty-one thousand, eight hundred and twenty-four souls breaking their fast with the Bread of Life.

- And yes, $2^{30} = 1,073,741,824$. Does this seem unreasonable?

A couple final thoughts to think about at home:

- Think of those who hate the good, really because they hate their own wickedness!
- They are yearning for something which their own ideology cannot give them. They are hungering and thirsting for the justice of God, whether they know it or not.
- This is our Christian duty, for we do not save our souls alone, but only in companionship with others.

The Sixth Word

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

It is finished! (It is consummated.)

At first glance, this combination of Beatitude and Last Word seems to be the least corresponding. What peace? What is being finished (or consummated, completed, concluded, achieved, accomplished)?

- Look at the reference to Saint Augustine; “Peace is the tranquility of order.” What is the opposing reference?
- “My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, do I give unto you.”

Something to think about at home – tying together the first six Beatitudes.

The poor in spirit will be hated by those who pursue self-interest; the meek will be opposed by the self-assertive; those who hunger and thirst

after justice will be scorned by the indifferent; the merciful will be ridiculed by the unforgiving; the pure of heart will be the laughingstock of the Freudians. The world whose false peace is based on self-love will make war against those whose peace is based on conscience.

In that sense Our Lord brought the sword—we might say he even made war—war against war, war against selfishness, war against sin, war against godlessness. And if his war against evil brought him to the Cross, then his followers who preach his peace must also expect to be crucified.

Yes, the Prince of Peace brings war—war against a false peace, war against tranquility without order. If there is anything in life of which we must beware it is the danger of a false peace. Our Lord could have made a false peace with the world.

So again, What is Finished?

The Seventh Word

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

What can we say about this statement?

In fact, the modern man steels himself even against the suffering of another by wearing the mask of indifference, quite unmindful that such a thickening of his spiritual skin, though it may sometimes protect him from sorrow, nevertheless shuts in his own morbidity until it festers and corrupts.

What can we do during our lives on Earth such that God will not have to say, “You already had your reward.”

- What are our options for the roads to take?
- Why must we mourn?
- For whom must we mourn? For What?

Final thoughts: To you whose life is as a fountain of tears for sins, remember that just as baptismal water washed away your original sin, so your tears will wash away your actual sins, and a day will come when God himself will wipe them all away.