

Views from the Pews: The Beatitudes

In Luke's Gospel, it just says, "Blessed are the poor," and sometimes people think, "Well, Matthew modified that. Poor in spirit -- that takes a little bit of the edge off of it." But it really doesn't. It simply helps us to realize that when Jesus is talking about "Blessed are the poor," he's talking more about an *attitude*, a way of knowing one's need for God, which is a disposition of the heart and not simply economic deprivation.

Poor in spirit means that we understand a profound truth about ourselves -- the truth that none of us is responsible for our own existence and our own continuance of existence. Poor in spirit means we understand our need for God and who God is and who we are. Poor in spirit means we understand that without God and God's gift to us of existence, of life, [that] we would not be. God has loved us into being. God has loved all of creation into being, and it's only God's love that sustains all of creation as it continues to evolve and develop in each one of us God's continuing love. At any moment, our life can be taken from us. In fact, our very existence could be taken from us; only God keeps us, has drawn us into being, and sustains us. That's a profound awareness that each of us somehow should nurture within ourselves, because that's the basis for being poor in spirit, for understanding our need of God at every moment.

If you were economically poor, you might have a sense more clearly of your need of God and of all that God can provide. When we have way more wealth than we need, sometimes we begin to think that with that wealth, it gives us power. We can do what we want; we don't need anyone else. We don't need God. How wrong.

Rather, we have to find the way to make ourselves aware of our need for God in that most profound way. Not just the need for God to provide us with everyday needs, but our need for God to provide our very existence and to sustain us. We understand that we need enough to have a full human life, but we don't need excess. When we become aware of that, our whole approach to God changes. We begin to be converted to the way of Jesus.

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