



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 5 February 2020 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning,

Today we are examining the first of the eight Beatitudes of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus begins to proclaim his path to happiness with a paradoxical announcement: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (5:3). It is a surprising path and poverty is a strange condition for beatitude.

We have to ask ourselves: what does he mean here by the “*poor*”? If Matthew had only used this word, then the meaning would have been simply economic, that is, it would have meant people who have few or no means of sustenance and are in need of the help of others.

However, unlike Luke’s, the Gospel of Matthew speaks about “*poor in spirit*”. What does this mean? According to the Bible, the spirit is the breath of life that God communicated to Adam: it is our most intimate dimension, let us say the spiritual dimension, the most intimate one, the one that makes us human beings, the profound core of our being. Thus, “the poor in spirit” are those who are and who feel poor, mendicants in their intimate being. Jesus proclaims them Blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

How many times have we been told the opposite! You have to be something in life, be someone ... One must make a name for oneself.... Loneliness and unhappiness stem from this: if I have to be “someone”, then I am in competition with others and I worry excessively about my ego. If I do not accept being poor, I hate everything that reminds me of my fragility. Because this fragility prevents me from becoming an important person, someone who is rich, not only moneywise, even well-known: everything.

Before oneself, everyone knows well that, as much as one does one’s best, he/she remains radically incomplete and vulnerable. There is no trick to cover up this vulnerability. Each of us is vulnerable inside. One has to see where. But how trying life is if one does not accept one’s

limitations! Life is hard. One lives poorly. One does not digest the limitation; [yet] it is there. Proud people do not ask for help. They cannot ask for help. It does not come easily to them to ask for help because they have to appear self-sufficient. And how many of them do need help, but their pride prevents them from asking for help. And how difficult it is to admit a mistake and ask for forgiveness! When I offer advice to newlyweds who ask me how to live their marriage well, I tell them: “There are three magic words: may I, thank you, I am sorry”. They are words that come from poverty in spirit. One must not be intrusive but rather say excuse me: “Do you think it is good to do this?”, so there can be dialogue in the family, spouses are in dialogue. “You did this for me, thank you I needed it”. We always make mistakes, one slips: “I am sorry”. And usually couples, newlyweds those who are here and are numerous tell me: “The third one is the hardest”, saying sorry, asking for forgiveness. Because proud people cannot do this. They cannot say they are sorry: they are always right. They are not poor in spirit. The Lord instead, never grows tired of forgiving. Unfortunately, it is we who get tired of asking for forgiveness (cf. [Angelus, 17 March 2013](#)). The tiredness of asking for forgiveness. This is a bad state!

Why is it difficult to ask for forgiveness? Because it humiliates our hypocritical image. And yet, constantly seeking to hide one’s weaknesses is tiring and distressing. Jesus Christ tells us: being poor is an opportunity for grace; and he shows us the way out from this difficulty. We are given the right to be poor in spirit because this is the path to the Kingdom of God.

But a fundamental thing must be mentioned: we do not have to transform ourselves to become poor in spirit. We do not have to undergo any transformation because we already are! We are poor ... or more clearly: we are “wretched” in spirit! We are in need of everything. We are all poor in spirit, we are beggars. It is the human condition.

The Kingdom of God is of the poor in spirit. There are those who have kingdoms in this world: they have goods and comforts. But they are kingdoms that end. The power of men and women, even of the greatest empires, pass and disappear. Often we see on the television news or in newspapers that that strong, powerful leader or that government that existed yesterday and no longer exists today, has fallen. The wealth of this world fades away and so does money. The elderly used to teach us that shrouds have no pockets. It is true. I never saw a removal truck behind a funeral procession: no one takes anything with them. This wealth stays here.

The Kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit. There are those who have kingdoms in this world, they have goods and comforts. But we know how they end. Only those who know how to love what is truly good more than themselves, reign. And this is the power of God.

In what way did Christ show his power? It was by doing what the kings of the earth do not do: give his life for mankind. And this is true power. The power of fraternity, the power of charity, the power of love, the power of humility. This is what Christ did.

Herein lies true freedom: those who have this power of humility, of service, of fraternity are free. The poverty praised in the Beatitudes is at the service of this freedom.

Because there is a poverty that we have to accept, that of being alive, and a poverty that instead we have to seek, the practical one, in the things of this world, in order to be free and to be able to love. We should always seek freedom of the heart, the freedom that has its roots in our own poverty.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from England, Australia, Vietnam and the United States of America. Upon all of you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

Lastly, I greet *young people*, the *elderly*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. May the Lord support with his grace, the goal of building up the Church through our sacrifices, overcoming our egotism and placing ourselves at the service of the Gospel.
