

**2014 Lent Retreat in Daily Living
Prayer Material for Week of April 8**

Day 1: Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Most of us can recite the Beatitudes by heart. And even those who can't get them all or get them in the correct order know that the first Beatitude is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

Macrina Weiderkehr paraphrases the first Beatitude in this way: "Blessed are those who are convinced of their basic dependency on God, whose lives are emptied of all that doesn't matter. The Kingdom of heaven is theirs."

In *Poverty of Spirit*, a beautiful extended meditation on the subject, Johannes Baptist Metz calls poverty of spirit "not just another virtue, one among many," but "a necessary ingredient in any authentic Christian attitude toward life. Without it there can be no Christianity and no imitation of Christ."

Take some time to reflect on the depth of your understanding of our utter dependence on God. And not just to understand, but to accept that we cannot find rest in ourselves. To embrace the reality that (in Metz's words) "at the core of our existence, a transcendental neediness holds sway," a neediness that can only be satisfied by God.

What is it like to realize your total dependence on God? Is it a comfort or a challenge to you?

What in your life makes you feel most inadequate? Most in need of God? Is it a blessing or a curse?

What are some concrete ways that you need to change your attitude in order to become "poor in spirit"?

How have you experienced poverty of spirit in times of transition?

Day 2: Blessed are They Who Mourn

Consider Sr. Macrina Weiderkehr's paraphrase of this Beatitude:

Blessed are those who wear compassion like a garment, those who have learned how to find themselves by losing themselves in another's sorrow. For they too shall receive comfort.

Reflect on some of the mournful or sorrowful experiences of your life. Consider particularly times of transition, which often lead to difficult situations.

How has sorrowing/mourning been a positive experience in your life? A negative experience?

In those places where you felt your heart was breaking, did you find comfort in your relationship with God?

Are there sorrows or pains in your life you have given up on that you are now willing to reexamine? Can you allow God to comfort you in those places?

Day 3: Blessed are the Meek

Start by reflecting on your understanding of the beatitude on meekness.

On the *Intentional Disciples* website, one of the contributors, a priest named Fr. Mike, posted a series of reflections on the beatitudes that he made while preparing a homily for a baptism. One of those posts considered, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Fr. Mike’s discussion dispels the misunderstanding we tend to have about the meaning of meekness. Meekness, he suggests, is really about understanding that it doesn’t always have to be about me. Meek people “don’t have to be number one, they don’t have to win the argument – they can actually engage the other as ‘other,’ – ‘not like me’ – and delight in the difference. They can experience life, people, creation itself, all the graces God offers us daily, as an unearned gift – which is the nature of an inheritance.”

Meekness is not weakness and it does not mean we should let everyone walk all over us. It is also not insecurity...in fact, not having to be number one, not having to have the focus on oneself, requires a certain level of security. It is, however, about humility, and about experiencing “all the graces God offers us daily, as an unearned gift.”

Reflect on Fr. Mike’s description of meekness. Then consider

Under what circumstances do you find it difficult to be meek?

Are there situations where you feel like you have to be number one? Where you feel like you have to win an argument?

How do you respond when your pride is hurt?

What methods of “non-meekness” do you use to get your way?

Do you have difficulty experiencing things “an an unearned gift”?

Day 4: Blessed are the Merciful

The most difficult aspect of being a disciple of Christ is granting forgiveness. On the Cross Jesus gives us an example of that specifically Christian virtue. He even goes so far as to offer an excuse: they know not what they do...

Although we know this teaching of Jesus so well and have heard over and over again the many scriptural passages that reinforce it, we still are impressed in our day when someone acts accordingly. Instead, how frequently we hear people seeking vengeance rather than forgiveness. Perhaps we all suffer from a confusion of ideas. First, we know that justice must be done and confuse it with vengeance. Forgiveness is not to deny justice, but only to add the kind of mercy that we ourselves would want from others. Secondly, forgiveness does not mean to forget. Living with the memory of wrongs done can prevent us from their repetition. What forgiveness does is purify our own hearts and minds of hatred and vengeance and free us up. Thirdly, whether we sincerely ask for forgiveness or whether we seek to forgive others, ultimately we know what we really desire is reconciliation. Reconciliation goes beyond forgiveness in an attempt to expunge from our minds and from society all those obstacles that prevent all of us from living truly good, humane lives, concerned about the good of all.

(Rembert G. Weakland, *Echoes from Calvary*)

Only in Luke's passion does Jesus heal the ear of the servant who came to the Mount of Olives to arrest him. Only in Luke does Jesus reconcile Herod and Pilate, his judges who had been enemies up to the time they met him. Only in Luke does Jesus stop on the way to the Cross to express his concern about the Daughters of Jerusalem who wept for him. And only in Luke will he extend his grace to the criminal crucified with him who asked to be remembered. And so it is not surprising that again, only in Luke, do we have from the crucified Jesus a word like "*Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.*"

In loyalty to a Lucan Jesus who told of the mercy of the father for the prodigal son, should we not be challenged to go further and forgive even those who *do* know the wrong that they are doing?

(Raymond E. Brown, *Echoes from Calvary*)

How are mercy and forgiveness related? Is your experience of being merciful also one of being forgiving?

Is there someone you are finding hard to forgive? Why? What can you do to help yourself move closer to forgiving this person?

Spend some time thanking God for the mercy He has shown you and then asking Him for the strength to demonstrate that same mercy to others.

Day 5: Blessed are They Who are Persecuted for My Sake

Consider the courage and fortitude of those who have been martyred for their faith. Archbishop Oscar Romero, for example, consistently spoke out against poverty, social injustice and government-sanctioned torture, even when it became clear that his words would lead to his death. When his friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande was assassinated, Romero said, “When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, ‘If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.’”

Or take the example of Heinrich Maier, a European priest who was part of the resistance movement during World War II, who was arrested for his stand against the enslavement and killing of millions by the Germans. I read that Maier was “tied, naked, to the window grating in prison and tortured; even under torture, he did not betray a single one of his co-conspirators.”

Think about all of the Romeros, Maiers and countless others over the years who were killed as a consequence of their efforts to live their own lives consistently with the Gospel and to call others to do the same. Most of us will not be asked to face death for our faith. But we are asked to proclaim the Gospel with courage, to live and exhort others to live Christian lives even when it is not easy to do so.

In his recent book, *Deeper than Words*, Brother David Steindl-Rast has a chapter titled “Suffered Under Pontius Pilate.” Brother David views the claim in the Creed that Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate” as something that must have significance beyond the mere historical reality that a man named Jesus suffered under a representative of the Roman Empire named Pilate. Instead, the juxtaposition of this line with the preceding claim that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary

draws our attention to opposite poles: there a woman who gives life, here, the man who kills; there, the vulnerable virgin, here, the powerful politician; there, a new beginning in the power of the Spirit, here, its destruction by the spirit of power. Because Jesus stands for God’s world order he must clash with an upside-down disorder that calls itself order. In this collision, however, he suffers shipwreck.

The phrase “Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate” reminds us that there is a cost to discipleship, it tells us that if we are people of faith who follow the example of Jesus, there will be a price. To proclaim belief in the reality that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate

means I know who the top dogs of the world are – then and now; I know them by name, and I know what suffering they can inflict on those who speak up; and yet I put my ultimate trust in Jesus Christ the underdog. It means I know what happened to him and is likely to happen in one way or another to his true followese, and yet, I commit myself, as the Quakers do, “to speak truth to power.”

Reflect on the martyrs and on Brother David’s words and consider:

Am I willing to “speak truth to power” as Jesus and the martyrs did, knowing what a tremendous cost it may require of us?

Day 6: Blessed are the Peacemakers

Begin by reflecting on Sr. Macrina Weiderkehr's paraphrase of this beatitude:

Blessed are the creatures of peace, those who build roads that unite rather than walls that divide, those who bless the world with the healing power of their presence. For they shall be called children of God.

What does it mean to you to be a peacemaker?

Are there circumstances where you do or say things that divide rather than unite?

What are the obstacles to your acting as a peacemaker?

What graces do you need from God to be a peacemaker?

How can you remain at peace during difficult moments?

Day 7: Blessed are the Clean of Heart

Here is what one commentator said about this Beatitude:

Clean, Pure; To be free from dirt or defilement. Defile; corrupt.

Blessed is the person whose heart is not dirty or corrupt. If our heart is clean, our life will be clean.

How can I tell if I have a clean heart? Easy. You can tell by *what* you do, and *why* you do it. This is the difference between the disciple and the Pharisee, and how a disciples righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees. The *motivation* for what we do, not just what we do. Remember the Pharisees liked to receive men's praise, and Jesus said they received their reward. Their reward was the praise they received, and to receive that praise, was their motivation. Our motivation however, should be the reward of the praise of Jesus, "Well done good and faithful servant." (Matt. 25:21)

Jesus also reminds us that, what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart and that is what defiles a man. (Matt. 15:18)

The evil motivations of the heart lead to evil actions but, the clean of heart shall see God.

Reflect on some of the choices you have made in life. What were they based on? How might you need to change some of them?

What inhibits you from being pure of heart? Fears? Situations? Being too tied down by things? Or the views of others?

Are there closets or corners in your heart that need a "spring cleaning"? Let God into those corners and give you a clean heart.