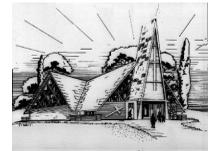




Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach

## Sermon for Septuagesimae

*Jesus says: Blessed are the poor in spirit!*



The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 5, 1-12:

- <sup>1</sup> Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.
- <sup>2</sup> And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:
- <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- <sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- <sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

- <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- <sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- <sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
- <sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
- <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

• Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will hear the Word of Jesus and be blessed! Amen.*

### • Dear Beloved of the Father!

- Jesus goes onto a mountain, sits down and opens His mouth and teaches by speaking, to His disciples first of all, but also for the crowd to hear. Remember, Jesus had received the Holy Spirit by baptism. Here on the mountain Jesus gives His first full sermon. This is what the Holy Spirit teaches! A very significant teaching which is absolutely unique and radical in so many aspects.
- The uniqueness starts already with the fact that Jesus *speaks* it to them. The teaching does not happen internally, direct from spirit to spirit. The Holy Spirit preaches through Jesus, orally, from mouth to ear! The Holy Spirit uses God's creation. He uses the body of Jesus, He uses language to convey the message. He does not bypass the gifts of the first creation. This is in sharp contrast to what pagan spirits and spirits of gnostic movements, then and now, claim to do. They all assume a direct inspiration of the spirit without the word. In fact something is only considered to be

really spiritual if none of the means of the first creation were used. The Holy Spirit does not work in this way.

- And there is a specific way Jesus spoke and preached: He spoke with *authority*, not like the Scribes!<sup>[7,29]</sup> What this means, we will hear and see in a moment.
- The very first phrase of Jesus' Sermon, the heading of the Sermon goes like this: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*
- When Jesus says "Blessed are" He states what is. By speaking it to the spiritually poor, they are blessed. He declares them to be blessed. It is not wishful thinking. He blesses them by speaking it to them.
- The crucial context for interpreting this first beatitude is found in Mt 11,2-6 where Isaiah 61,1 is quoted: *"Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the **poor have good news preached to them.** And **blessed is the one** who is not offended by me."*
- The poor have good news preached to them. This is exactly what Jesus does here. And we learn what "blessing them" means: saving them. It is not only to be "happy". One could also translate, "redeemed" are the poor in Spirit!
- What persons does Jesus pronounce to be saved, to be blessed? Answer: the poor in spirit or the spiritually poor! What exactly does this phrase mean? From Mt 11 we can learn that Jesus was ministering to people in an objective condition of need, those who were blind, lame, lepers, deaf, dead and the 'poor'. This means, this is not a description about the *attitude or awareness* of these people. To be "poor in spirit" refers to an objective status or condition. The poor in spirit are those who are destitute in spirit, without what one needs in the spiritual realm.
- Therefore, in Jesus' opening statement, He embraces all of fallen humankind, for by nature all people *are* poor in spirit. No one is excluded! This is truly astonishing! The trouble is of course, many don't realise that they are poor in the spirit! Most are in denial and believe the opium of satan, that there is something spiritual in everyone! In truth, all are in need to hear the Good News! The blessed Good News belongs to all people, because in reality no one has the spiritual ability or strength to participate in the spiritual realm of God! To these poor ones, Jesus says, "The reign of heaven is *theirs!*"
- This goes against every single grain and fibre of our old Adam's religious piety. To our old Adam only those who are rich in the spirit can be blessed ones in the spirit. How can one be poor yet be blessed?

- The reign of heaven is theirs! Jesus declares this to be so! This is His mission in a nutshell. This Word of Jesus is an utter declaration of promise and grace to the worst sinner!
- This, dear poor in the Spirit, Jesus speaks to you today: Blessed are you. The reign of heaven belongs to you! In context, we can say, Christ belongs to you and everything He has to share with you! So, if you are down and out, here is the gift of Christ for you: blessed are you, here, the kingdom comes to you!
- A new world is created and the poor in Spirit, those who don't know the ways of God are placed in the doorway of the new creation. A new reign is revealed to them, which in many ways is the very opposite of how things work in this world.
- Jesus then carries on. These poor in the Spirit of His are described more and they receive more promises from Him!
- Listen to this: Blessed are those who mourn- really, seriously, those who mourn are blessed- yes, for they will be comforted. They *will* be comforted is the promise from Jesus. Here the comforting is in the future, because in the day of the resurrection from the dead all tears will be wiped away. Death will be no more! This is a powerful promise and yet it is very realistic.
- Luther says it like this: *"Therefore simply begin to be a Christian, and you will soon find out what it means to mourn and be sorrowful. ... You will be hindered and hemmed in on every side, so that you will suffer enough and see enough to make your heart sad."*
- Full comfort will not happen whilst here in this world. Whilst the kingdom is yours now already, you will experience mourning because of sin, evil and death all around you and in you. The poor in the spirit live in the tension of 'now already' participating in the kingdom of heaven, but the final fulfilment of the promises is 'not yet'. That will come only on the Last Day.
- However, these promise are so certain, because they are spoken with absolute authority. These promises are so certain, that they influence the present flawed existence of the poor in the Spirit. Jesus' poor in the Spirit suffer, on the one hand, yet on the other hand they live in the light of what is and what certainly will come! The promises of Jesus create a most certain hope!
- This certainty comes from the fact, that Jesus is the true Son of God- He is the Lord on the mountain stating what IS in the kingdom of God! He Himself is the guarantee. The guarantee, the certainty, does not lie in the poor in the spirit, in who they are, in what they do or feel. Jesus speaks it onto us and therefore it IS.
- The poor in the spirit are the meek (lowly) ones who will inherit the earth. On the

Last Day our newly fulfilled existence will not be a life without our bodies. We will live on the new earth! Those who suffer oppression at the hands of wicked forces now, will receive the blessings of God's great reversal. In other words, Jesus sees your need. He knows that you are suffering. It does not go unnoticed if other trample all over you, because you belong to Him.

• And of course, those who are the lowly ones, the ones who absorb evil done to them, they hunger and thirst for righteousness! They long for everything in the world to be made right. They are the ones sighing, not only when they watch TV, but also when they take a serious look at their own lives! They are the ones who cry, Lord have mercy- make right what is broken. Renew what is dead. Clean what is evil.

• The promise, you will be satisfied. It is on its way, the final reign of God where everything will be right. Evil will not be there! That means for us, don't cling to evil in your lives, in your old self. Don't, like a fool, walk towards doing evil. Let Christ turn you around, today, and begin to walk away from evil! We don't need evil. We neither need to taste it to realise, oh yes, it is evil! Evil is contagious. Don't touch! It deceives. It smells and looks good, but it kills!

• Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy! The last blessing we will cover for today. The poor in spirit, who know that they are poor in the spirit, will not look down on other people. They will themselves share mercy with all people. They will rather absorb harm done to themselves than retaliate in any way. They can do this, because of the mercy they have received from their Lord. Immanuel, God with us, shares His mercy by blessing us, although we are weak, although we are poor. The reign of Christ excels in being merciful. The poor in spirit are blessed by their Lord and are flooded with mercy to hand out, to share to those who still want to fight for their rights, who still want to justify themselves at all costs.

• The new reign of Christ prospers with an abundance of His gifts. Gifts prepared to be handed out to the poor in spirit. Indeed, blessed are you, the poor in spirit, because the kingdom is yours! **Amen.**

• *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.** [Phil 4,7].*

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