

THE BEATITUDES: PORTRAIT OF THE MASTER PART 4: BLESSED ARE THEY WHO MOURN

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

Once again, we are confronted in the Beatitudes with an apparent contradiction. Jesus declares blessed, or happy, those who are sad and in mourning. Like the blessedness of the poor, which means much more than simply material poverty, Jesus is not declaring people blessed simply because they are in grief. The reason for a person’s mourning and its orientation within the person’s Christian discipleship are what make it blessed.

To understand this, we look to examples of when Jesus mourns, such as the death of his friend, Lazarus: “When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Sir, come and see.’ And Jesus wept” (John 11:32-35).

The expression, “he became perturbed and deeply troubled,” means that Jesus was stricken to his very soul, but stricken by what? It seems odd that Jesus would be so moved by Lazarus’ death when Jesus knew full-well that he would raise Lazarus from the dead. In fact, a little earlier in the passage, Jesus states quite the opposite when announcing Lazarus’ death to his disciples: “Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe” (John 11:14). What strikes Jesus so deeply is not any personal sense of loss or self-pity, but rather his awareness of the presence of evil in the situation, embodied by death, and the pain and suffering that it caused his friends and their community. Jesus responds by sharing in their grief and comforting them with an experience of God’s saving power, turning Lazarus’ death from a source of grief to a sign of hope and new life.

This Christ-like mourning is what Jesus declares blessed and a source of comfort, not focusing on ourselves and grieving from a sense of personal loss, but recognizing the darkness that is present in times of grief and sharing in the grief of others. By being a shoulder for others to cry on, preparing a meal for a family who has lost a loved one, attending a wake or funeral service, or any other form of presence in times of sadness, we disciples of Christ mourn with them and provide them a comforting experience of God’s saving power and life. That is how those who mourn are blessed.