

THE BEATITUDES: PORTRAIT OF THE MASTER
PART 5: BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

In his apostolic exhortation, *Rejoice and Be Glad*, Pope Francis notes the interesting choice of words that Jesus uses for this beatitude: “hunger” and “thirst.” These are basic, primal urges for something essential for life, food and drink. By using these words, Jesus tells us that righteousness is just as essential for a fully Christian life, and, if we desire righteousness with that kind of urgency, we will receive it in full.

The biblical concept of righteousness has to do with our relationship with God. To be righteous is to be in right relationship with God, to be faithful to his commands as he is faithful to his promises to us. God’s ultimate pledge to us is the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, who, through his fidelity to the Father, came to restore us to right relationship with God when we had broken that bond through sin. Because of Jesus, we are restored to righteousness with God: “For our sakes God made him who did not know sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we live in a saving relationship with Christ, we live in righteousness with God, as Jesus told his disciples on the night before he died: “Anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him; we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him” (John 14:23).

But righteousness with God also requires right relationship with one another: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar, for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment that we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:20-21). Right relationship with our brothers and sisters means first that we relate to them as fellow children of God created to live in fullness of life with him forever. As such, right relationship with our brothers and sisters means recognizing their basic right to all those things necessary to fully live as God’s children and doing our part to ensure that they have full access to those necessities. This is the meaning of justice, and only by striving together for justice, especially on behalf of those most in need, can we attain righteousness with God: “‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’” (Matthew 25:37-40). May we hunger and thirst for justice, as Christ does, in the sure and certain hope that our faithful God will fill us with his righteousness.