

THE BEATITUDES: PORTRAIT OF THE MASTER  
PART 2: BLESSED ARE THE POOR

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5: 3).

*Rejoice and Be Glad* is the title of Pope Francis’ latest apostolic exhortation. In it, he reminds us that all people are called to holiness, and the Holy Father offers advice on how to answer that call, whatever our state in life. Holiness, in essence, means Christ-likeness, and it is expressed simply and purely in the Beatitudes, which Pope Francis calls a “portrait of the master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives” (63). Taking Pope Francis’ lead, and building on his own thoughts in *Rejoice and Be Glad*, I will reflect for the next several weeks on the Beatitudes as a path to holiness for all, beginning this weekend with the first Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Like all of the Beatitudes, we look to Christ to see what this means. Jesus was certainly poor. As a wandering teacher with no source of steady income, he and his closest companions relied on the kindness and charity of others to meet their material needs. But a spirit of poverty means more than just lacking material things. Jesus didn’t have material things because he didn’t care about them, at least not as a major priority. His first priority was always the kingdom of God, and the urgency of his mission to proclaim and to bring that kingdom into being did not leave time or space for worrying about material things: “Do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides” (Matthew 6:31-33). This is why the poor in spirit, like Christ, possess the kingdom, because they seek it with all their heart and let nothing else stand between them and their goal.

Adopting a spirit of poverty requires us to examine our hearts to see where our hopes for happiness are found. Do we place our hopes for happiness and peace in material possessions, job security, a comfortable home, and other worldly things, or, like Christ, do we place our hope in the kingdom of God? Material possessions are fleeting. Jobs come and go. Even our homes will one day no longer be ours. All of these things are ultimately beyond our control. But Christ’s promise rings true: for those who are poor in spirit, the kingdom of God is ours, and it will never pass away. May we strive for a true spirit of poverty in our lives, and claim our share in God’s eternal kingdom.