

Blessed Are Those Thirsting for Righteousness ...

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

As it was with the first beatitude, the addition of two words in Matthew’s version – “for righteousness” – raises this blessing from the material level to a spiritual plane.

Luke’s Gospel renders this beatitude as satisfaction for those “who are now hungry.” With the other Lucan beatitudes, it promises a reversal of fortune in the Kingdom of God for those who are poor, hungry, sorrowful, or persecuted. But just as Matthew extended the concept of poverty to the poor “in spirit,” in this beatitude the concept of hunger and thirst is extended to those who are thirsting “for righteousness.”

What is righteousness? Usually, it refers to the state we are in when our moral conduct conforms to God’s will. The righteous person is one who lives by the commandments. But if “righteousness” here consists of just our good deeds, we could satisfy our hunger by our own behavior – how would this be a blessing from God? However, here Matthew uses “righteousness” to mean the saving actions of God, which make it possible for us to live in accordance with his will. Matthew uses “righteousness” in the same way when he has Jesus counter John’s objection to baptizing him by saying, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (3:15). And later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (6:33).

We recognize that – despite our best intentions – our own actions are insufficient to get us right with God and keep us on the path to the Kingdom. We need God’s ongoing help to stay faithful to our commitments to Him. We cannot save ourselves, but our loving God acts not only to save us through the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus but also to keep us in the community of salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the righteousness for which we hunger and thirst.

We are blessed when we feel deep within ourselves a longing for God’s salvation, when we know we need this to survive as much as we need food or water, and when we experience this need as a hunger and thirst, physically as well as spiritually. Blessed, because we will be satisfied. Blessed, because our God is with us, nourishing and saving us daily through His Spirit within us.

So what does this mean for our day-to-day living? Is it enough that we deeply feel the need for righteousness? That we are convinced that God will save us? No, we must also *act* on that conviction. We need to acknowledge the things in our lives that divert us from God’s Kingdom, that block his saving actions from affecting us. We must then turn away from these distractions and return to our loving and merciful God. We need to live Jesus’ command to love as he has loved us. We need to humbly admit that we cannot save ourselves, so that we can accept God’s saving actions on our behalf. In a word, we need to experience conversion – turning to God – on a daily basis. Then we can be confident that he will satisfy our hunger – more than we can ever imagine.