

## **Blessed Are Those Who Mourn ...**

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (MT 5:4)

What is mourning? It’s deeper than just sadness or regret – it’s a blend of grief and sorrow at the realization that we have lost something. In some cases, our mourning seems so unbearable that it might tempt us to give up, to stop living.

What might cause us to mourn? Certainly, the death of a loved one comes quickly to mind. It is the most personal and most poignant event of loss which we encounter. But there are other losses that we experience that might cause us to mourn. For example, a diagnosis of a serious illness, in which we realize that we no longer have the good health which we took for granted, might make us mournful. Or personal mistakes we have made, through which we may have lost respect, or a work position, or our family’s trust. Or perhaps the failings of close friends or relatives have shaken our assessment of them. It may even be the failure of political or religious leaders to uphold the ideals of our nation or our faith community. In any of these situations, we can be so deeply moved by our sense of loss that we are truly mourning. We may become so distressed that we want to quit our involvement in an activity or in a civic or faith community.

Why, then, would anyone who mourns be considered blessed? Not because of the mourning itself, or the events that led up to it. There’s nothing appealing about a situation of mourning. Rather, it is because of God’s action toward the grieving person that the mourner is blessed – for God promises to comfort those who mourn.

Note that God doesn’t promise to remove or reverse the event that gave rise to the mourning – this beatitude isn’t a “quick fix” for everything that goes wrong. God’s action isn’t directed to the event itself, but to the person, the mourner. God promises to give comfort, to not leave us alone in our grief, to not abandon us to our overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, to sustain us when we might want to give up. It is a reminder of the truth of “Emmanuel” – “God with us” – not just when we are filled with joy, but even – perhaps, especially – in the depths of our sorrows.

The comfort which God will give is not just a passing good feeling – it is a supportive and sustaining energy which gives us real strength to deal with the situations that cause us to mourn. With God’s help, we won’t just “get over” the situation – the strength of His Spirit can enable us to do something good, to make a difference in a positive way.

In this beatitude, Jesus doesn’t just present a distant hope of future comfort to those who mourn – he invites the mourners to come closer to God now, to put their trust in Him now, to receive from Him the life-affirming strength of the Holy Spirit now, so that they will be able to witness to God’s love in their daily lives and further advance the fulfillment of His Kingdom.

There was another aspect to this beatitude for those who heard Jesus speak: those who mourned the evils and sins of the people of Israel would soon be comforted by the Messianic salvation brought through Christ’s sacrificial actions.