

## Blessed Are the Clean of Heart ...

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.” (MT 5:7)

This beatitude isn't about cardiology and unclogging blocked arteries, but about our interior disposition, our true commitment to the Gospel. To appreciate its rich meaning, let's consider some related Scripture passages.

The psalmist speaks of these requirements for participating in divine worship: “Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain, nor swears deceitfully to his neighbor.” [Ps 24:3-4]

When Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples for not performing ritual washings before meals, he rebuffed them, saying, “It is not what enters one's mouth that defiles that person; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one. ... The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile.” [Mt 15:11, 18]

In exile, the psalmist speaks of his desire for the Temple in Jerusalem: “When shall I go and behold the face of God?” [Ps 42:3] In Hebrew, to “behold the face of God” was an idiomatic expression for “go to the Temple.” “Appear before the Lord” (e.g., Ex 23:17, 34:23-24; Dt 16:16, 31:11) had the same meaning.

In this beatitude, Jesus emphasizes a clean heart – one's interior disposition – over the ritual washings done before eating a meal or entering the Temple. This is what one must do to stand before the Lord, to take part in the Temple worship. The prophets of the Old Testament repeatedly called for the people to turn their hearts to God, to internalize their Covenant commitment, so that they could truly be God's holy people. Jesus is anticipating his later condemnations of hypocrisy – of merely appearing to observe God's commands, while actually plotting ways around them. He wants his disciples to have “clean hearts” – to internalize God's commands and live them in their daily lives, not to give them mere lip service.

Those with a clean heart will “see God” – that is, they will be worthy not only of standing before God in the Temple's holy places, but of being with God in His Kingdom.

Those who so transform themselves into Christ's disciples and eliminate selfishness from their lives (the “clean of heart”) will also see God in the people around them, responding to their needs with compassion, forgiving them their transgressions, loving them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. They will see God in themselves, realizing the presence of God in their words and actions, for the Holy Spirit dwells in them and motivates them. They will see God in the Church's sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and will celebrate them more attentively. Finally, they will see God in all of creation, and be more caring of the physical world in which they live.

“Seeing God” is not just a “hereafter” experience – it begins when we join God's People, continues as we grow in virtue, and reaches its climax when we pass through death into the eternal fullness of His Kingdom. Blessed, indeed, the vision of the clean of heart!