

# **Beatitudes - A Carmelite Perspective**

*- excerpted in part from the writings of Sr. Patricia of Mary Magdalene, used with permission*

## **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”**

All Carmelites promise to practice the “spirit of poverty.” This does not mean they sell everything to become poor in the monetary sense, but that spiritually they “sell” or rid themselves of everything that stands between them and their goal, the Lord.

It is not easy to become poor in spirit. However, Jesus promised to those who are poor in spirit the Kingdom of Heaven as their reward for so doing. He did not refer to a distant kingdom, or presence, in the next life but a kingdom of peace and tranquility and contentment in the here and now.

The virtue practiced and attained in this beatitude is “detachment.” The practice of detachment to things produces the fruits of peace and contentment in our daily lives. The practice of detachment does not mean a deprivation of those things that are necessary to daily living, i.e., food, clothing, transportation, a home. The practice of detachment involves more an attitude of “holy indifference” to material goods, to make use of goods as a means and not an end in itself. The moment we begin to take pleasure in “things” we are attached to them. Detachment is a moderation of our desires, obtaining only what is necessary or good for ourselves and our families. Detachment is also a willingness to “let go” and “let God.” Accepting wealth or poverty with the same holy indifference; both as the selfsame blessing from God.

Should a person find themselves blessed by God with wealth, this “holy indifference” would detach a soul whereby their blessing may be turned to virtue through acts of charity. But for wealth to become a real virtue it requires acts of charity without recognition or public attention, with no thought of recompense.

We have spoken only regarding worldly goods, but being “poor in spirit” must go beyond worldly for the contemplative soul. It has to do with our very attitudes about ourselves and God. Detachment and poverty in this sense requires being at peace and contented with God’s will for us at each stage of our development. Then truly is the Kingdom of Heaven within us.

We will speak of poverty and detachment as viewed by contemplative saints and discuss their purpose and meaning for us:

St. Teresa of Avila in “The Book of Her Life” - Chapter II - says: “But it seems to us that we are giving all to God, whereas the truth of the matter is that we are paying God the rent or giving Him the fruits and keeping for ourselves the ownership and the root. We resolve to be poor - and this is very meritorious - but then very often turn back to being anxious and diligent about possessing not only the necessities but superfluities as well and about winning friends who might provide these things for us.”

This deals with what we have mentioned before. Our human nature never changes - not from the beginning of time until the end - there is the constant battle of wanting, of taking, of hoarding. Even friendships are sometimes counted as “the more I have the better I am.” We have to even learn to accept friendship as a gift, not to be possessed, but free to come and go, to move on when the spirit leads. Sometimes having no friends is true spiritual poverty.

St. John of the Cross in the Ascent of Mount Carmel - Book II, Chapter 7 - says: "Oh, who can make this counsel of Our Savior understandable, and practicable, and attractive that spiritual persons might become aware. They are of the opinion that any kind of withdrawal from the world or reformation of life suffices. Some are content with a certain degree of virtue, perseverance in prayer, and mortification, but never achieve the nakedness, poverty, selflessness, or spiritual purity that the Lord counsels here. For they still feed and clothe their natural selves with spiritual feelings and consolations instead of divesting and denying themselves of these for God's sake. They think a denial of self in worldly matters is sufficient without an annihilation and purification of spiritual possessions."

Spiritual poverty is far more important to us than worldly poverty. For it is our spirit that lives on forever and this world and our flesh will fade away. If we keep this in mind, we will see how unimportant it really is to have material goods that count as nothing in the next life.

St. John of the Cross developed the idea of "nada" - "nothing" - and this is what we must become to be poor in spirit. Being "nada" does not mean degrading ourselves or constantly putting ourselves down. It means not placing too much pride of importance on the little good we do, and keeping in mind the good we must learn to do.

St. Therese, the Little Flower, said in a letter to her sister Celine, "He became poor so that we could be charitable to Him. Like a beggar, He stretches out His hand to us. He it is who wants and begs for our love. He doesn't wish to take anything unless we give it to Him and the smallest trifle is precious in His divine eyes."

Herein lies the secret of being "poor in spirit." To have all and yet be willing to utterly disregard it for the sake of another. To surrender all love to our fellow man, so as to be empty and open to the love of God. Asking for nothing so that even the smallest trifle of life becomes a precious consolation. To be overflowing with the love of God within us, and yet to delight Him by begging for more. A spirit of poverty that seeks nothing but the glory of God in all things.

St. Therese of Lisieux writes in her "Story of a Soul:" "Jesus does not want me to lay claim to what belongs to me; and this should seem easy and natural to me since nothing is mine. I have renounced the goods of this earth through the Vow of Poverty, and so I haven't the right to complain when one takes a thing that is not mine. On the contrary, I should rejoice when it happens that I feel the pinch of poverty. Formerly, it seemed to me that I was attached to nothing, but ever since I understood the words of Jesus, I see on occasions that I am very imperfect. For example, in my work of painting there is nothing that belongs to me, I know. But if, when I am preparing for some work, I find that the brushes and the paints are in disorder, if a rule or a penknife has disappeared, patience is very close to abandoning me and I must take courage in both hands in order to reclaim the missing object without bitterness. We really have to ask for dispensable things, but when we do it with humility, we are not failing in the commandment of Jesus; on the contrary, we are acting like the poor who extend their hand to receive what is necessary for them; if they are rebuked they are not surprised, as no one owes them anything."

We may be both surprised and heartened to find that the beautiful saint like St. Therese of Lisieux suffered the same irritations that we do today, and yet she utilized them for the glory of God. It is interesting to note that the above passage was included in her writings on "charity," and how her handling of her own defects was an act of love.

Lastly - we turn to Thomas Merton - a contemporary but saintly man - in his *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Chapter 28. He said, "There are aspects of detachment and refinement of interior purity that even the majority of sincerely holy men never succeed in discovering. Even the strictest monasteries and in places where people have seriously dedicated their lives to the search for perfection, many never come to suspect how much they are governed by unconscious forms of selfishness, how much their virtuous acts are prompted by a narrow and human self-interest. In fact, it is often precisely the rigidity and unbending formalism of some pious men that keep them from becoming truly detached."

Here we are getting to the core and essence of poverty in the spiritual sense - finding and eliminating those interior faults which are hidden and illusive, but can still hinder us from the Kingdom of Heaven. And how difficult it is to do this because often we don't notice or realize our true motives for doing things, even virtuous things. However, we should not become overly scrupulous on this account, but again offer even our virtues, for whatever they are worth, to God begging Him to make them worthy and to help us to be poor in spirit so we will not recognize or take pride in the virtue itself, but strive onward as unworthy servants.

Another point Father Merton mentions is rigidity and formalism in some pious people. This is not only a detriment to the person themselves, but a scandal to holiness. Whenever adhering to a rule, tradition, or any system which makes or promotes its law at all cost even when it goes against charity or the law of God, then it is bordering on sinfulness and is a scandal to the truly poor in spirit who are free in love and charity. Furthermore, persons who are rigid and unbending frighten and turn off others who may be seeking charity and holiness in their own lives. Some instances of this are as follows:

- 1) It is important to contemplative prayer and spirituality to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, attend daily Mass, and devote at least half an hour each day to meditation (Carmelite obligations), but if someone in your family or a close friend calls or comes to see you and needs your assistance or even your companionship at that moment, then charity demands that you be their helpmate and companion then, and come back to the devotion later if possible.
- 2) If you were in the middle of a personal fast day but - say - your mother-in-law called or came over and wanted you to go to lunch or dine with her, then for the sake of charity and good will, it is better to drop the fast for that day and do it another time. The blessings will be more for this act of charity than for the fast.
- 3) Or if you have promised God to do a certain penance - or even a most virtuous deed - but in the process of doing these you are interrupted by a person who would not understand your intentions or misinterpret the act, it is better to put off the penance or virtuous deed if scandal against your faith will occur. Even a virtuous deed done aggressively and obviously in front of others can become a source of the sin of pride. Poorness is humility, too. Making ourselves appear "less" virtuous in some instances is the "most" virtuous thing to do.

A final word from Father Thomas Merton: "Sometimes, for instance, a monk can develop an attachment to prayer or fasting, or to a pious practice or devotion, or to a certain penance, or to a book or system of spirituality, or even to a method of meditation and contemplation itself, and on to the highest graces of prayer and virtue, things that are in themselves marks of heroism and sanctity. And men who seemed to be saints have let themselves be blinded by their inordinate love for such things."

Another final point with regard to being “poor in Spirit” is that it means even divesting ourselves of inordinate desires for holy things. Because clinging to the richness of consolations can prevent us from being empty and open to God’s graces in other areas of our lives. If we hold on to the richness of consolations because of the good feelings it gives us, we will never be able to get through the Dark Night that leads us to Heavenly Union.

So, let us be truly poor in spirit, emptied of all desires for worldly and spiritual pleasures, so our God can fill us with His Heavenly Kingdom.

## **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth.”**

In Webster’s Dictionary, the word “meek” is described as “mild of temper; patient under injuries; long-suffering; gentle and kind.” This surely describes Jesus’ life and how He wants us to imitate Him. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.”

Because meekness and humility are almost always tied together, the virtue of humility should be the one to be developed under this beatitude. “Humility” is described in the dictionary as the synonym for “meekness” and is also used in the same sentence by Jesus together with “meek” in the Gospel. Let us take each of these meanings and see how they may be applied to our daily lives.

What is the meaning of “mild of temper?” We all have a temperament. Some of us are a bit more fiery and passionate than others. By this is meant that sometimes we are quick to jump to conclusions, or hasty to defend ourselves when wronged, quickly rising to anger over little things. We not only have to work towards having an “even temper,” but a mild, softened, relaxed temperament.

When we study the word “humility,” it helps us to understand that life is too short to always raise our blood pressure over minor annoyances which pass very quickly and are soon forgotten. Humbly, we accept our own limitations and the limitations of others. We constantly struggle through this beatitude, attempting to meekly and humbly temper our attitudes towards ourselves and others. However, one may ask, “Is there not righteous anger?” But this anger should be used only for the defense of others who are wrong, to set right injustices to others, and not for our own pride, glory and self-esteem; all of which run counter to humility.

The second phrase we encounter in the dictionary’s description of the word “meek” is “patient under injuries.” Injuries can be both physical and psychological. Being patient under either one of these takes great humility. Christ Himself is our example of great humility. He patiently and humbly accepted both physical and verbal abuses when, as God, He could easily have destroyed them with the blink of His eye.

Physically, when there is the pain of an illness or an operation, or even a recurring health problem, we must humbly pray asking for the grace to bear our cross, not running away from it or regarding it as an evil thing or something to be avoided at all cost. No, rather we humbly accept all of these things as Jesus did, offering it for the salvation of others as He did; even humbly forgiving those who took part in His pain. Here, however, it must be stressed that it is not suggested or implied that one should not accept any form of relief from pain either. Whether it is aspirin or prescription medication, please take what is available. It is “false” humility and masochism to enforce pain upon oneself. When we refer to being “accepting” of all pain or injuries, it is meant that we accept all pain and suffering during those times when it is unavoidable. Life holds so many opportunities for offering physical suffering for others without having to go and look for it. Just accept what must be.

Psychologically, we may have to endure verbal abuse, false accusations, embarrassment, emotional stress, disappointments, etc., in a patient, humble and forgiving manner. This is more often harder to accept than physical injuries, and we must pray that Jesus shows us the way through these trials or the “Dark Night.” Our natural inclination is to strike back, to right the wrong, and to sometimes make a few accusations of our own. This is where humility must enter so that we may “bite the tongue” and look away, and smile inwardly at the knowledge that great graces are being drawn down upon us in this way. Even a kindness in return for evil will do more for the salvation of the other soul. Here again

it must be stressed that if the emotional or psychological pain or injury is such that it really requires professional assistance, then false humility must not stand in the way. See the help that is needed, because to not do so could mean much harm instead and not be in the spirit of this beatitude.

What now is meant by “long-suffering?” This is going even further than the first two phrases, as it may require indefinite or extended or permanent suffering. This too can be physical or psychological. Physical, because the injury or illness may require suffering over a long period, maybe terminally to the end. Jesus had to suffering “unto death” and we, no doubt, will one day come unto death, too. This can be a miserable and lonely time, or it can be an opportunity to not only offer this trial for graces for others, but to give example to those around us of our faith in God and the belief in the rich reward awaiting us; for having left this earth, we shall then truly “possess the earth” as this beatitude states.

Psychological “long-suffering” may include the spiritual pain of seeing loved ones no longer practicing their faith, or emotionally supporting an alcoholic, maybe coping with the constant needed care of a retarded child or paraplegic family member. To be “long-suffering” requires a high degree of humility, because often the very things that qualify under “long-suffering” are problems we can do nothing about; and humbly accepting the challenge requires abundant graces from God.

Finally, we come to “gentle and kind.” Gentle and kind are twin sisters, each much alike at first glance, but underneath they are individuals that compliment each other. Gentleness clothes herself in patience and tenderness, while Kindness adorns herself in humility and affection. Both are ready to be of service to all, and each supports and assists the other. If you have Gentleness and Kindness, you possess all because Jesus tells us we would possess the “earth,” which is all that mankind is capable of possessing in this life.

Now, I would like to discuss how the Carmelite Saints and contemplative contemporaries commented on this beatitude and its virtue. St. Therese of Lisieux epitomized Meekness and Humility. Her “Little Way” consists almost entirely of being meek and humble of heart. She realized and accepted her littleness and humbly accepted God’s love in spite of any unworthiness. She was patient and kind under injuries, long-suffering both physically, because of tuberculosis, and psychologically due to the ridicule and insults often placed upon her by a certain superior and other sisters of her community. She is a contemporary example for us to follow in this beatitude, for now her “Little Way” is possessed by the earth. It is recommended that her works be read periodically.

The Little Flower had a great love for the writings of St. John of the Cross, and John of the Cross had a lot to say concerning Spiritual Meekness. In his “Dark Night,” Book I, Chapter 5, he writes: “Because of the strong desire of beginners for spiritual gratification, they usually have many imperfections of anger. This frequently occurs after they have experienced in prayer some recollection pleasant to the senses. After the delight and satisfaction is gone, the sensory part of the soul is naturally left vapid and zestless. This imperfection must be purged through the dryness and distress of the Dark Night.

“Among these spiritual persons there are also those who fall into another kind of spiritual anger. Through a certain indiscreet zeal they become angry over the sins of others, setting themselves up as lords of virtue. All such conduct is contrary to spiritual meekness.” This statement needs no explanation, because spiritual meekness does not cause self-righteousness nor does it gloat over the faults of others, but humbly recognizes our own faults to be purged.

St. John of the Cross also writes: “Others, in becoming aware of their own imperfections, grow angry with themselves in an un-humble impatience. So impatient are they about these imperfections that they

would want to become saints in a day. They do not have the patience to wait until God gives them what they need when He so desires.” This is also contrary to spiritual meekness, but the opposite of what he spoke of before. First, there was anger against others, then anger against ourselves. But if we must be patient and meek and humble towards others, then also should we be towards ourselves, remaining open to God’s Will in all things.

Finally, to hear from one of our contemporary Saints, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Although immersed in an active mission, she indeed is a contemplative. Time for prayer and meditation is an absolute requirement for her and her sisters before they take on the duties of caring for others. In a book called *The Love of Christ*,” she is quoted as saying to her religious the following: “These are a few of the ways we can practice humility” (which is the essence of meekness):

- Speak as little as possible of oneself.
- Mind one’s own business.
- Avoid curiosity.
- Do not want to manage other people’s affairs.
- Accept contradiction and correction cheerfully.
- Pass over the mistakes of others.
- Accept blame when innocent.
- Yield to the will of others.
- Accept insults and injuries.
- Accept being slighted, forgotten, and disliked.
- Be kind and gentle even under provocation.
- Do not seek to be specially loved and admired.
- Never stand on one’s dignity.
- Yield in discussion even though one is right.
- Choose always the hardest.

In consideration of the above maxims, it may be stated that these make an excellent “examination of conscience.”

In sum, all that has been said herein reiterates what St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross professed, and reflects Christ’s life in the Gospels. To be little and unnoticed; to do all for God’s glory and not our own love and consideration. Let us strive then to acquire Meekness and her sister, Humility, so that in the acceptance of the little things of this life, all that God possesses will be given unto us.

## **“Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”**

Mourning! What causes people to mourn and how are they comforted? Why would Jesus say that it is blessed to mourn? Why is it included in the Beatitudes along with Mercy, Justice, Meekness, and Cleanness of Heart? What kind of virtue would assist and compliment mourning? These cause much soul-searching and prayer to the Holy Spirit - the “Comforter” – for guidance.

One thing that I believe to be true, is that the mourning to which this Beatitude refers goes far beyond minor disappointments or temporary grief. It is surely a matter of the deepest sorrow that rends our very soul, and is not likely to be relieved by anything in this life. When loved ones die, we mourn. However, time eventually heals as that love once shared is channeled into others.

We see poverty and starvation in the world and mourn, but often we feel so helpless about this and simply pray for their comfort and turn our thoughts elsewhere. We mourn because of the greed and corruption and thoughtlessness of the nations of the world, always on the verge of war; but we are so caught up in the day-to-day struggle of our own personal lives and hope that no one will push the button of destruction before we can accomplish our own goals. So, what could cause such deep sorrow and mourning and how is it comforted? (NOTE: I believe that type of mourning is the deep and penetrating sorrow for our sins, brought on not by our own meditations but by the Grace of God, so that He in turn sees our “sorrow unto death” which then elicits his great Mercy upon us.)

It wasn't just to the Jews of Jesus' time that He speaks of mourning, since all mankind has been mourning over various things from the beginning of creation. Through Old Testament trials and captivities, through the long wait for the Messiah, through Christian persecutions, through the Dark Ages of ignorance, through the unjust wars of our times, all creation mourns for its Creator until creation itself is no more. This Beatific mourning is inborn and a vital force in our spiritual life, because it creates the constant longing, conscious or unconscious, for perfection, for finding good, feeling love, and experiencing the sacred and holy which can only be found in God Himself. It is to this mourning which I believe Jesus was referring to and promising the Holy Spirit, His Comforter, to see us through this mourning period. Every human being has some deep subconscious yearning for something perfect, always loving, ever giving, that can be grasped forever and not just fade away in a few moments or days.

Much of humanity never really knows or understands what this yearning is about. But we who have been gifted with Faith in the God of Creation, who have been bestowed with the Love of His Son, now Hope for the Comfort of His Spirit. Therefore, the virtue that stands out to me to be nurtured in this Beatitude is Hope. Hope that the mourning we endure for our Creator now will one day be comforted in His Beatific Vision.

Hope was one thing our Carmelite Saints spoke of in all their works. Many of our contemporary contemplatives also wrote of this Hope that changes mourning to comfort. I will list several and comment on their relation to the Beatitude and our daily lives.

First, we will quote St. Teresa of Avila, the “Way of Perfection,” Chapter 30, Part 6: *“And to those whom He gives here below the kingdom we ask for, He gives pledges so that through these they may have great hope of going to enjoy perpetually what here on earth is given only in sips.”* She means that the joys of the graces and consolations God grants us here below are meant to enhance our yearning and hope for what He will give us who persevere in perpetual Union with Him in the next life.

And in the “Interior Castle,” Third Mansion, Chapter 2: “*So it is better to carry out what our rules says, to strive to live always in silence and hope, for the Lord will take care of those souls.*” St. Teresa of Avila here encourages us to always strive to do what is right in our lives and/or vocations knowing with all hope that the Lord will assist us along the way.

In St. Teresa’s “Life,” Chapter 40, Part 18: “*Once in comforting me, He told me with much love that I shouldn’t be anxious, that in this life we cannot always be in a stable condition, ...that sometimes it will have disturbances and at other times have quiet, ...but that we should hope in Him and not be afraid.*” Here she relates how periodical trials in our life may make us anxious, a mourning for a quieter time, but that we should continue to hope and He will give us comfort.

St. John of the Cross also had some comments on mourning, comfort, and hope. In “The Ascent of Mt. Carmel,” Chapter II, he writes: “*We have given proof that a soul must renounce all possession of the memory in order to reach union with God in hope. The soul, therefore, must live in the nakedness and forgetfulness, ...so as not to impede union of the memory with God through perfect hope.*”

Only a soul that is naked and forgetful of its worthiness can have the perfect hope that leads to union with its Comforter. By renouncing the memory of all previous graces and consolations, the memory becomes naked and open to the hope of perfect union. In his “Dark Night,” Book II, Chapter 9, St. John writes: “*These are the effects produced in the soul by this dark night which enshrouds the hopes one has for the light of day...the spiritual suffering is intimate and penetrating because the love to be possessed by the soul will also be intimate and refined.*”

This is the reason why God permits this “dark night” to come upon us, the dark night being the soul mourning within itself, an intimate and penetrating mourning after the Love by which it hopes to be possessed.

Lastly, in his “Spiritual Canticle,” Stanza 20 in which he speaks of “swift-winged birds” and “winds and ardors,” he explains “*The winds allude to the emotions of hope, for like the wind they fly toward the absent object. David also says, “I opened the mouth of my hope and drew in the breath of my desire because I longed for your commandments.*”

St. John is using the Psalms to explain how the absent object, which was the Beloved, caused such yearning that hope was all he had to drive him on to find the Beloved. David, too, uses hope to give the breath of life to his desire and longing for the commandments which are the Word of God, or God Himself.

The Psalms, themselves, are full of messages of mourning over favors lost and hope for renewed grace. St. Therese, the Little Flower, suffered this mourning of the dark night in the final year of her life and her continued hope brought her to the Eternal Comforter. It was the yearning and mourning for this Loving Comforter from her childhood on that helped her develop the Little Way as a guide for others.

Then there is Luis M. Martinez, the late Archbishop of Mexico, from his book, “The Sanctifier,” concerning the Third Beatitude: “*The soul feels emptiness and darkness all around it. The concept that it formerly had of human things is overthrown. Knowledge, wealth, honor, affections, without their old adornment are sad ruins that inspire only fear. The very depths of the soul have been transformed by the light.*”

This confirms what was spoken of earlier that this detachment of the previous Beatitude has now brought about a sadness over the things of this world and a mourning is felt in the very depths of the soul.

Archbishop Martinez further states, *“Then it sees its own misery clearly as well as the vanity of all that is created. ...so repugnant does the spectacle of human life in its sad nakedness appear, so intolerable the sight of the soul itself, that it seems as impossible to live such a life as to live in a tomb. For, in truth, it has died mystically, it has died to earth, ...to rise afterward to a new and transfigured life where God will dry its tears and attach other delicate and celestial wings that will take it soaring to the very summit.”*

I feel that in this paragraph, Archbishop Martinez was giving his own commentary based on St. John of the Cross’ Spiritual Canticle, Stanza 20, that was quoted earlier. After the mourning and death of all that keeps us from the Beloved, we are given swift-wings of hope that fly us to the summit of the Comforter.

Lastly, Archbishop Martinez states: *“But the day of eternity begins already in exile; it is like a beautiful dawn for happy souls. The solace of tears is a prelude to eternal joy. The fundamental consolation (God) encourages the just in the combat of life and at times makes them forget the miseries of exile (in this valley of tears) and gives them a supernatural strength to work without tiring, to suffer without failing; for their eyes and heart are fixed on that paradise whose substance they penetrate by faith, whose reality they already possess through hope, and whose joy they begin to taste through love.”*

So, you can see that although it is part of our human nature to experience life and death, love and hate, good and bad, happiness and sorrow, trials and successes, sickness and health, these are all just the training ground for our spiritual lives within. They teach us patience, perseverance, understanding, and mostly hope for something deeper and lasting. The fleetingness of these experiences brings about a restless mourning for the eternal. As St. Augustine said once, *“Our hearts will find no rest until they rest in Thee.”* This longing and sighing deep in our souls is the ultimate hope that the Beloved will take us from this valley of tears and comfort us in His eternal love.

**“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.”**

When Jesus spoke these words nearly 2000 years ago, there was indeed a great hunger and thirst for justice. The Jews were under the Roman yoke and were looking for justice in the form of a savior that would overthrow the Romans and restore the kingdom of David. They could not understand this talk of a “kingdom within” and were certainly not satisfied in “turning the other cheek.”

Today, the innocent are still full of hunger and thirst for justice. The world still seeks a savior to bring justice for their causes and satisfaction for the masses. Most of humanity still has no understanding of the “kingdom within” and still find no satisfaction in “turning the other cheek.”

We must presume that there is a reason for all the injustice of this world, since God has allowed its presence from the beginning of mankind. In fact, it seems to be coexistent with the human species. Although justice is one of the attributes of God, so man being in His image, has been given both the ability to cause it and to distort it. When I see an injustice being done to someone, do I try to help them or turn away saying, “it’s none of my business?” When I hear the poor and innocent victims of unjust political wars, do I try to help through donations or simple prayer for peace, or do I shake my head and just say “poor people”? God in His eternal patience waits to see what we will do.

As contemplatives, it is our ideal and goal to “feed the hungry” through our prayer, to “quench thirst” through our meditation, and to appease justice through penance and sacrifice. We must, for mankind’s sake, make this journey into the “kingdom within” in search of union with God. We must be prepared to “turn the other cheek” with very little apparent justice or satisfaction along the way. But this is where our virtue for this beatitude comes in - and it is plenty of PATIENCE! PATIENCE! PATIENCE! Patience for the journey within as our souls are drawn by a secret hunger and thirst that is never satisfied. Patience for the journey without that often brings trials and misunderstandings as “slaps” to the cheek. Patience as the spirit suffers the dark nights of St. John of the Cross, and patience as the spirit soars through the ecstasies of St. Teresa of Avila.

Our first and primary model for this virtue is Jesus Himself. The ultimate example of injustice was this loving and forgiving Savior being slapped and spat upon and nailed to the cross by the very people He came to save. Yet the richest example of patience was His silent humility as He accepted the insults and physical blows to His most precious cheeks. If ever there had been a time for the vengeance and justice of God, it was then.

Knowing that God, the pure justice, could have destroyed us long ago, we should strive to emulate His patience in tolerating our own, and others’ imperfections. We know also that His justice is tempered with mercy and this aspect will be discussed in the next beatitude. Here I feel that the virtue of patience is the main intermediary between justice and mercy. Indeed, before mercy can take place, patience must have allowed time and circumstance to mitigate and soften the anger rightfully due by justice, thus permitting mercy to sneak in and the back door.

Justice can create opportunities for both good and evil. Good if it develops one’s views of honesty and integrity. Good if it promoted mercy and forgiveness when circumstances require it. But justice can be evil, too, if used for its own sake, as a cover for self-righteousness, or as a reason to ignore the needs of others. For instance, if we feel someone is not worthy of our assistance because of some differences in race, creed or political beliefs. If justice is thought of in its good or proper aspect, it will lead us to the hunger and thirst spoken of in the beatitude. A hunger and thirst that desires to feed the starving, assist the downtrodden, bring freedom to the oppressed, peace where there is strife, unity and fellowship

amongst all peoples. But we will not be able to be all things to all people, and our ways are not always God's ways, and not understanding or knowing His Divine plan in all this will require the virtue of patience. Patience that is born of Faith in God's ultimate victory, patience that is nurtured by Hope in His promise to be with us to the end, and finally a patience brought to maturity by a loving and merciful God.

I believe each beatitude is designed to assist us in the developing of a virtue. In this instance, because we cannot understand why so much injustice prevails, it is imperative that we learn of God's patience, knowing that not a bird falls or hair of our head lost without His Divine purpose. Each seeming injustice is, in reality, an opportunity for action on someone's part. If one nation is starving, then another should help feed it through their abundance. As contemplatives, our "action" is prayer. As contemplatives, our prayer is continuous night and day without ceasing. We, like the Little Flower, as missionaries of Justice by our example of honesty, integrity, morality, and spirituality in a world hungry for it.

Let us look at some of our Contemplative Saints for their views of justice. St. Therese in "The Little Way" says, "I know that the Lord is infinitely just; and this justice, so alarming to many, is the very reason for my joy and trust. Being just doesn't only mean being severe in punishing the guilty; it also means recognizing good intentions and rewarding virtue." Here we can see that justice has two sides, not only the act committed, but the true intention for which something was done is considered so that it rewards as well as punishes. There are always emotional, physical, or environmental influences that we cannot or might not be aware of at the time. God sees all things and this is why He tells us not to judge others. God knows the total picture of this puzzling world, but for us who hunger and thirst, our lives are spent fitting our allotted pieces into that puzzle, each of us as a part of the whole. It is imperative then to be patient until Divine Justice reveals the ultimate Wisdom of His ways.

St. Therese was, and saw God as, a "bold lover." She was not afraid of Justice and presented herself simply and boldly at the feet of her Spouse trusting in His Mercy. She says, "That, my dear brother, is what I think about God's Justice; my way is all trust and love, and I do not understand souls who are afraid of such a loving Friend." She could trust and love, because she had developed patience and tolerance of her own imperfections and she practiced this virtue in many instances throughout her community life and illness. Her hunger and thirst were so intense that God privileged her among the few whose sacrifice as Victim of His Love brought her glory in her own time and presented a model in times to come.

Patience is not an easy thing to come by, even for Saints. St. Teresa of Avila, in the founding of her reformed convents, often had difficulty with this virtue, and usually because of injustices heaped on her due to the reformation of her Order. She even lost her patience a few times with God and was not afraid to speak of her frustrations to Him. But where she did excel in patience was in prayer, and this accomplishment allowed her to teach us about her prayer experiences with such knowledge that she became a Doctor of the Church. For those who hunger and thirst through prayer and meditation, her wisdom and patience are beacons in the dark nights.

St. John of the Cross, on the other hand, was filled with patience. Through imprisonment and "dark nights" he never questioned the Justice of his God, and to our benefit created the most beautiful canticle to his Spouse, Jesus, which is about the patient search, the hunger and thirst, of the lover for its Beloved.

For our “contemporary contemplatives,” I have chosen again Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the late Archbishop Martinez of Mexico.

What extreme example of injustice Mother Teresa faced every day, masses of people starving, dying and death in the streets, poverty and disease everywhere. How can the merciful God allow this? There is literal hunger and thirst for justice and very little satisfaction. Yet, Mother Teresa patiently began each day with prayer, prayer that the affluent world does not understand. Here was an opportunity for the world to provide justice in the form of giving, sharing, sacrificing, and yes, patiently praying, to a God who does not want or desire suffering, but we humans do permit it and miss many graces that could be gained in answering God’s call to be a savior to others.

And finally, from the late Archbishop Martinez, from his book, “The Sanctifier,” he writes, “Thus the Holy Spirit bestows upon us a divine fruit, patience, in the midst of our ordinary struggles. But we not only have to endure afflictions, we have to suffer the deferred expectation of good things needed and desired. This is the reason why the saints in the last stages of their spiritual journey, felt an unspeakable martyrdom; the martyrdom of desire.”

And so, I close this beatitude with the hope that we will never stop having a hunger and thirst for God, our Divine Justice, and by our unceasing prayers, let us become the intermediary patience between His Justice and Mercy.

## **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”**

At first glance, this Beatitude would seem to need no explanation or commentary. It is a case of pure and simple mercy, given and received. But the actual giving and receiving is not as easy as it seems.

From the beginning, we must acknowledge that the virtue for this beatitude, like the beatitude itself, is mercy. However, its application in our daily lives, as we shall see, will be one of the most difficult of all.

Mercy, by its definition, is Forbearance, Compassion, Forgiveness, Clemency, Charity, Kindness, Benevolence, Tolerance, and Pity. Together, these will broaden our concept of mercy and help us to realize the full meaning of what it is to be merciful. We will cover each of the aspects of Mercy and how they apply to our daily living. Hopefully, we can become better persons, more contemplative, and reveal another side of the Jesus within us to our world without. We will study both the giving and receiving of mercy, as given by us to others and received by us from God.

First there is Forbearance, the quality of patience and long-suffering. We discussed patience in the previous beatitude and its position as mediator between Justice and Mercy. Here we see the fruits of patience first of all in forbearance, “bearing one another’s burdens.” Bearing another’s burdens can be negative if it is seen as suffering through someone’s criticism, insults, or misunderstandings. But it can be positive if it is patient endurance with respect and understanding for the source of the burden, knowing that we ourselves are not perfect and deserving of the same forbearance. Does not God, Himself, suffer to bear the burden of our sins with patient endurance, aware of our human nature and limitations? Happy are we who have such a patient and long-suffering Savior, and happy we should be to do the same for others.

Next is Compassion, literally meaning “with passion,” the quality of both empathy and sympathy. Empathy is being able to truly understand and feel another’s burdens as if they were your very own, whereas sympathy is feeling sorrow and passion with another as “response” to their situation. Psalm 102:13-15, says: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust.” Let us strive to be both sympathetic and empathetic with people with whom we come in contact, for the giving and receiving of both are essential for true compassion and mercy. Christ became human like us in order to reveal to us His compassion for our humanity, can we do less for others?

Then there is Forgiveness, the quality of not only pardoning an offender, but to cease remembering the offense. We hear much about forgiving our enemy, but what about forgiving our spouse, or a family member, or coworker? Those closest to us, who’s faults are most apparent because of the daily contact, can be the most difficult to forgive. But the key word to forgiveness is forgetting. As Christians, we have been practicing forgiveness for centuries and what we have failed at is forgetting the offense. It seems to stay tucked away in our computer-brain without being able to clear the memory. Weeks, months, or years later, we manage to bring back the offense to our mind, and then we must do the forgiving all over again. If we could just learn to erase it completely, the forgiving would be once and for all. What a sorry and hopeless life we would have if our dear Lord was to do the same with us. Yet in Psalm 102:12, He says: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He put our transgressions from us.” Note that it says, “He put our transgressions from US!” Not only has He forgotten our offenses, but He wants us to forget them too. Once we are forgiven, WE ARE FORGIVEN!! For some reason we can forgive others before we can forgive ourselves. Forgiveness given to others must be received and accepted by us as well.

Now there is Clemency, the closest to mercy itself, which is the quality of leniency. It is being soft in judgment and going easy on justice. Like mercy, one must be charitable enough to manifest benevolence and good will in place of punishment or revenge. The greater the offense against us, the more we may be called upon to be lenient. The greater our sins against God, the more Jesus was prepared to suffer for us on the cross. The giving and receiving can be blessed, indeed, when our hearts become one with the bleeding heart of Jesus. When we try to know the circumstances behind the wrongful act of another, we will find that clemency becomes easy. How often our own deeds are looked upon by another with mistrust or lack of insight into our reasons, so the evil that may seem apparent at first could prove to be innocent or circumstantial after further investigation. Maybe even the evil done was, in fact, malicious and premeditated, but our clemency could cause remorse and conversion of the offender. At least we must consider all these things if we are put in a position to judge another, although it would be better to make no judgment at all.

Charity is the next aspect of Mercy we consider. They say “charity covers a multitude of sins,” but I think it’s also safe to say “charity is mercy in action.” Christ considered charity the greatest of virtues and this is because all other virtues are motivated and consummated in charity. Loving our neighbor as ourselves is an aspect of the giving and receiving of mercy. If we love others as ourselves, we are ready to show the forbearance, compassion, forgiveness and clemency we want for ourselves. Besides love, charity is affection and benevolence towards our fellow man and good will toward the poor and suffering. Charity has no meaning as a word unless it is put into action. Above all, in the giving of charity, it is hoped, trusted, and believed that the receiving of God’s mercy will follow, thus covering the multitude of our own sins.

Next we have Kindness and Benevolence which we will put together, because of their mutual propensity for acts of goodness, graciousness, mercifulness, and affection. It is a simple act of kindness to the spouse who has had a difficult and trying day, or understanding and tenderness for our children caught in the frustrations of growing up, or a friend who has problems and needs a listening ear. But kindness and benevolence go beyond this to the neighbor who has a real need or even a total stranger who could use a friendly smile. These can all be acts of mercy as warmth, acceptance, and kinship given and received flows over into eternity. The Psalms are filled with words of kindness the Lord has for us. A sampling is: “Your kindness is from everlasting to everlasting, O Lord,” and “the sins of my youth remember not; in your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord,” and “all the paths of the Lord are kindness toward those who keep his covenant,” and “I will rejoice and be glad in your kindness, when you have seen my affliction,” and finally “Let your face shine upon your servant, save me in your kindness.” These are just a few quotes, as nearly every Psalm mentions kindness at least once. In the context of these Psalms, kindness is synonymous with mercy, for David feels mercy IS kindness.

Tolerance and Pity are the last two aspects of mercy to be considered. Tolerance is similar to endurance or forbearance that was previously discussed. The only difference might be a degree of empathy involved since the toleration might stem from the realization of our own inadequacies and, therefore, more acceptance for the shortcomings of others. And pity, not the self-righteous, self-serving, superfluous type, but pity that is sympathy and compassion. We are speaking of pity that produces a desire to act, to provide aid or to spare another from pain or grief. Pity, like the other aspects of mercy, that considers our own miseries and faults and, therefore, is willing to work with our fellow man towards renewal and redemption. This is not pity that wallows in itself as if there was no hope, but pity that realizes its potential to assist and represent Christ to the poor and sorrowful of this world.

You may wonder which one of the “contemporary contemplatives” will be used to discuss mercy, but the contemplative I have in mind was lively, daring, extroverted, and a great sinner. He was not of our times, but his works are as meaningful today as they were nearly 3000 years ago. He may not be a contemplative in our modern day sense, but he contemplated God day and night like no other in his time. I am speaking of King David and his Psalms. No one to that time had been such a bold sinner, and yet he received so much mercy. Never before had there been such a passionate love relationship between the Creator and His created, and it spilled over into his living. The giving of mercy by David to Saul when he had the chance to kill him and didn't was part of the receiving of mercy by David when he went into the Holy of Holies pleading forgiveness for his sins. He could dance and sing before the Lord, because he had experienced God's kindness. We, ourselves, should take such delight in the use of the Psalms in our morning and evening Office. Each time we recite one, we can imagine ourselves as David pleading our cause before our Lord and praising Him for His mercy and kindness.

In closing, I quote another verse, Psalm 51: “Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness. In your compassion blot out my offense.”

## **“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.”**

Modern theologians have reinterpreted this Beatitude to say, “Blessed are the single-hearted, for they shall see God.” Pure, or clean of heart as it is also quoted, has now been thought of as single-hearted, because pure means complete, absolute, without taint of vitiation, and with one, single purpose. It is with this theological interpretation, then, that we will treat this beatitude.

Happy are we who have one, single, pure and simple goal in our heart, and that is to belong to, be in the presence of, and “see” our Beloved. This beatitude assures us that our persistent and steadfast pursuit of God will be rewarded. For this reason, I have felt the virtue best suited for this beatitude is the godly virtue of diligence, also known as perseverance. Diligence and perseverance are needed in order to be complete, absolute, without vitiation, and maintain a single heart or purpose.

First of all, we will delve into the pure and single heart to see what its goal or purpose is, or should be, as contemplatives. Then secondly, we will find out how we can pursue this goal with diligence and perseverance. And finally, we will see why, and the reward for, persisting in our single-hearted beatitude.

The heart has always been a symbol of love, and St. John the Apostle in his Gospel said: “God is Love.” Also, the heart is the center of our life force, the strongest muscle of the body, and the prime mover of our liquid being. It seems that love, life, God, and heart are one, single, and same necessary part of our nature.

God created humanity, with all its faults, for one single-hearted purpose: to share in His eternal love. Furthermore, God’s will is that we, too, have that same pure desire to share His love in return. All the Saints recognized God’s call to love and followed after it. What makes a saint different from the rest of humanity is their undaunted diligence and perseverance in answering that call with all their heart, mind, and soul.

We now know what the purpose and goal is of the single-hearted, so let us turn to the second part of how this is accomplished. How does one determine the call of God and how does one follow it without vitiation?

God’s call, or will for us, is ALWAYS to love. The vocational differences lie in how we respond, and these ways may vary as many as there are individuals. We certainly can’t all respond in the same way and each of us brings a unique quality or aspect to God’s designs. Although each of us has different personalities, talents, and walks of life, our one common vocation is to love. Sometimes we do not feel so lovable, or like being loving towards others, and this is where our perseverance and diligence come into play. We must set our eyes on Love and tenaciously walk in that direction.

Christ told us that the two main commands of life are to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. Since we have joined together here on this “Mount of Carmel,” it should be hoped that we have already placed God above all things and that He is our single-hearted goal. But do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Indeed, do we really love ourselves? Do we think that the saints all loved God and everyone else and not themselves? Since Jesus said to love our neighbor as ourselves, then it is a “Gospel truth” that we should love ourselves as much as our neighbor. Actually, to love ourselves and our neighbor is loving the same God that is in us all.

How do we love? To love is to give, share, accept, and to take as well. The giving and sharing is part of the accepting and taking. Each is a balance for the other. We give and we share so that others can come to know the God within us. Then we take and accept the God within others that is offered to us. The balance is created as the Holy Spirit uses the love of us all for the glory of the Body of Christ, which Jesus has offered to the Father.

The world offers many detours from the path of love and this is why diligence and perseverance are so necessary. A hundred intersections cross our goal and we mustn't take the wrong turn. Examples are not taking the time for prayer and meditation, or missing Mass without a good reason, or failing to support our parish whether monetarily or through our services, or avoiding the sick and needy. But these are all obvious Church-related detours. There are also civil matters such as exceeding speed limits, cheating on taxes, or failing to give a just day's service to our employers.

True love, the essence of real spirituality, goes much deeper and beyond the superfluous rules and regulations of the world we live in. It is an inner presence that helps us walk that extra mile, give our cloak as well as our coat, turn the other cheek, invest our talents, or sell all to buy the pearl of great price. This must be our one hope, our single-hearted goal, and our undaunted and diligent desire. Though money, property, ambition, prestige, and security will enter our life, we must not let them turn us aside from the road to love, or even detour us slightly from the path. Pray that the God of love will provide us the grace and virtue to remain steadfast.

Now that we have talked about the what and how of being pure, or single-heart, we will continue on the why. Why should we work so hard at love when so few seem to care or appreciate us? Why should we diligently do our duties and persevere in pursuit of beatitude, "for they shall see God."

To see GOD!!! What joy and enviable ecstasy!! What ultimate beatific vision!! If we could know how much God wants us to see Him, we would count the frustrations of this life as a pittance price. Yet, even now, His presence is before us, around us, within us, and we do not see. With the help of this beatitude, we can begin to see God now. We will not have to wait for the next life, but He will surely let us "see" Him in the countless activities of our day where He has always been, moving and drawing us in previously undetectable ways, which we did not notice before our heart was purified.

What do our Carmelite Saints and contemporary contemplatives have to say about this beatitude of love and vision? We will take from St. Teresa's "Interior Castle," St. John of the Cross' "Ascent of Mt. Carmel" and Thomas Merton's "New Seeds of Contemplation."

First we will see what our Carmelite Mother, Teresa of Avila, has to say in the "Interior Castle." In the Second Dwelling, Chapter I, she says: "Yet this Lord desires intensely that we love Him and seek His company, so much so that from time to time He calls us to draw near Him. His Majesty knows well how to wait many days and years, especially when He sees perseverance and good desires. This perseverance is most necessary here. One always gains much through perseverance."

In the Third Dwelling, chapter I, she said: "What shall we say to those who through perseverance and the mercy of God have won these battles and entered the third stage? Certainly we are right in calling such a man blessed, since if he doesn't turn back he is on the secure path of salvation."

Finally, in the Fifth Dwelling Place, Chapter IV, she says: "I say that if this soul were always attached to God's will it is clear that it would not go astray. But the devil comes along with some skillful deception and, under the color of good, confuses it with regard to little things. The diligence on our

part that comes to my mind as being most effective is, we must always ask God in prayer to sustain us. Love is never idle.”

Thus, we can see that throughout her “Interior Castle” diligence and perseverance are spoken of continuously as vital in order to reach the center and ultimate union, which is “seeing” God in the most intimate way possible this side of Heaven.

Next, we will look at our Carmelite Father, St. John of the Cross, concerning this beatitude and assisting virtues. In the “Ascent of Mt. Carmel,” Book I, Chapter 10, he speaks of the necessity of perseverance in practicing virtue in order to climb up the spiritual ladder. In Book II, Chapter 13, he speaks of the lack of diligence in spiritual matters as a sign that one may not be called or ready to ascend the heights of spirituality. In Book III, Chapters 3 and 44, he discusses how temptations of the “world, flesh and the devil” overtake souls on their journey up the ladder and how perseverance in prayer is most necessary. Like Teresa, his climbing of the spiritual ladder is likened to her finding the center of the castle, and the virtues of diligence and perseverance are like friends that accompany and assist us on the way. The further up the ladder or into the castle we go, the more the devil will try to sway us, therefore these virtues will be practiced more and more until perfected in the final stages.

One thing I did not mention before about this Beatitude that should be considered, because St. John of the Cross brings this up often, and that is the purification aspects of being “pure of heart.” Each beatitude represents another stage of spiritual growth and this one stresses the purification of our souls, becoming of one mind with God and a single heart joined to our Beloved. The reward is seeing God as He really is and not with false or unrealistic notions.

Finally, for our contemporary contemplative, Fr. Thomas Merton. His book “New Seeds of Contemplation” has a chapter called “The Pure Heart.”

His perspective of this was diligence in not allowing even rightful pleasures of this life to become overly important to us or taken for grants, either. Part of our purification is the discipline of forsaking even natural pleasures occasionally. He states, “The contemplative life certainly does not demand a self-righteous contempt for the habits and diversions of ordinary people. But nevertheless... No man who seeks spiritual freedom can afford to yield passively to all the appeals of a society of salesmen, advertisers, and consumers.” His concepts of diligence and perseverance are reflected in the care we should have in avoiding sinful circumstances, as well, in this statement, “Do everything you can to avoid the noise and business (busyness) of men. Keep as far away as you can from the places where they gather to cheat and insult one another, to exploit one another, to laugh at one another, or to mock one another with false gestures of friendship.” These are the subtle ways St. Teresa spoke of when she said the devil would come along with some “skillful deception, under the color of good,” as he confuses us on even slight sins against love and charity.

In conclusion, we can see the importance of this Beatitude in three important aspects:

- 1) As a single-hearted desire for the love of God;
- 2) As a way of loving ourselves and our neighbor through God; and
- 3) As a means of purification against the temptations of this world.

The strength and virtue of the pure of heart lie in its diligence and steadfast perseverance towards the goal of the Beloved; and the reward is a true apprehension and inner vision of the One Loved.

I close with a part of Psalm 51, which was the last words of St. Teresa before she died: “A pure heart create for me, O God. Put a steadfast spirit within me.”

## **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”**

At first glance, this beatitude seems rather paradoxical in stating peacemakers will be called “children.” It would appear more logical to state that it takes great maturity to bring about peace.

A second seemingly paradoxical statement is that we should be peacemakers in order to be called “children of God.” After all, we were told in the Gospels and in our catechism classes that we are already adopted children of God through Baptism and faith in Jesus Christ. Do we have to be peacemakers too? What do peacemakers and children have to do with each other? What does it mean to be both peacemakers AND children of God?

We have to reconcile these paradoxes with the fact that one of our main concerns as children of God is to promote peace in the world, at least in and around our own world we live in. Vatican II helped the Church (the children of God) by waking us up to this responsibility by encouraging social involvement and developing Peace & Justice commissions within Dioceses. And, since justice has a lot to do with promoting peace, I feel the virtue of justice is needed for the peacemakers of this beatitude.

First, let us study the meaning and responsibility of being a “child of God.” Jesus was the first man to openly proclaim to be the Son of God. The people of His day thought this was blasphemy. But Jesus’ whole life was a calling to us to be His brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the Father, coheirs to eternal life with Him in the Father’s bosom.

As a child of God, Jesus was bound to do the will of the Father, to be about His Father’s business proclaiming the Kingdom of God within and peace to all men of good will. As peacemaker, Jesus was sent by the father to reconcile us through His death and resurrection, to teach us forgiveness of sins, and bring our souls into harmony through the Holy Spirit.

In order for us to follow Christ’s example, we must do no less than He in reconciling ourselves to the Father, accepting forgiveness and leaving guilt behind and allowing the Holy Spirit to move freely through us. Now we too, like Jesus, are children of God.

How does the virtue of justice help us in these pursuits? Justice, by its very essence, is meant to bring balance, reconciliation, recompense, and peace between conflicting principles. Before Jesus’ time, it was “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.” But Jesus brought us a new perspective, one of loving the sinner and forgiving the sin, not judging unless you be judged, and even turning the other cheek. It was too difficult for the people of Jesus’ time to accept such a teaching, except from One Who would be ready to lay down His life to prove it.

As early as 1327, the position of Justice of the Peace was developed to conserve peace in various districts of England and this system followed over into the new world and even to this day in rural areas. Since Vatican II, we have become more aware of the injustice in other countries and many are called upon to become peacemakers through involvement in social causes, missions, or groups like the Peace Corps. Still others are called to help behind the scenes by a life of prayer.

Now that we have realized how the children of God have the responsibility of being peacemakers, and decided that the virtue of justice is needed, we are faced with another paradox. How can we, who are allegedly called to be prayerful and contemplative, be involved in something as social and active as peace and justice? Before we discuss this role of peacemaker and how we can be true children of God and yet be true to our contemplative calling, let us hear one quote from St. Teresa on this subject:

“Serve Our Lord in ways within our powers. Apart from praying for people, by which you can do a great deal for them, do not try to help everybody. Limit yourself to your own companions... By your doing things which you really can do, His Majesty will know that you would like to do many, and He will reward you exactly as if you had won many souls for Him.”

Being a contemplative (Secular Carmelite) does permit us the best of both worlds, the active and the contemplative. We can be active in our family and community in promoting peace and reconciliation wherever possible, and yet we join in the prayer of the Church morning and evening and meditate on God’s mysteries each day. Through an enlightened and sacred sense of justice, we can recognize the proper time for action and when prayer is the best course to take. It is through our prayer and meditations that we can contemplate and evaluate a situation, allow the Word of God to speak to us concerning it, and understand the will of God to be done.

The will of God is always justice, and through our intimate conversations with Our Lord we will surely develop the true sense of justice which is His will. Only then can we be sure that any action we take will be of benefit to the ones served and, therefore, bring peace.

Peacemakers do not necessarily have to be involved in social justice activities such as marches, sit-ins, card-burning, or foreign service. These can be good and may serve a purpose, but what about the injustices close to home, in our own families, our parish communities, or our place of employment? Peace and justice in these areas may require understanding in eliminating bias and prejudices, or helping to reconcile family members, or even resisting the desire to put our own rights or demands above others when it is not for the common good of the whole.

If demanding my own rights causes injustice and lack of peace to those around me, then what have I gained? But if I put self-righteousness aside to bring peace through justice for another, I will find there is deeper and more lasting peace within. This is not to say that we should permit injustices to be committed against us, but that we weigh and balance the good of all concerned and pray that the scales of beatitude are not left wanting. St. John of the Cross says in his *Minor Works*: “Blessed is he who, setting aside his own liking and inclination, considers things according to reason and justice before doing them.”

So let us now turn to our Carmelite Saints and contemporary contemplatives for their views of peace and justice. First we will take an excerpt from St. Therese of Lisieux and “Her Last Conversations.” She learned to cope with little injustices that even occur in the religious life. Her “Little Way” of handling the situation and maintaining peace in the community and within herself was silence. This quote was made in April, 1897, while she was in charge of the formation of the novices: “When we’re misunderstood and judged unfavorably, what good does it do to defend or explain ourselves? Let the matter drop and say nothing. It’s so much better to say nothing and allow others to judge as they please. We don’t see in the Gospel where Mary explained herself when her sister (Martha) accused her of remaining at Jesus’ feet, doing nothing!... O blessed silence that gives so much peace to souls!”

On the other hand, her predecessor, St. Teresa of Avila, did not feel silence was in the best interest of peace and justice. However, her outspoken opinions were always cloaked in humble directive and tactful reprimands. Even the Lord was not spared her opinions.

The particular quote I chose from her works, however, deals with God as Father in Chapter 27 of the “Way of Perfection:” “...how is it that you give us in the name of Your Father everything that can be given? For you desire that He consider us His children, because your word cannot fail... He has to

console us in our trials. He has to sustain us in the way a father like this must... And after all this He must make us sharers and heirs with You.” As for justice, we are certainly not deserving to be called, along with Jesus, as children and heirs, but His love for us goes beyond our childishness to our very need to be Fathered. And the peace our Father gives us is not like the world gives, but an inner confidence that brings strength to be His peacemakers in return.

Perhaps Thomas Merton, our contemporary contemplative, speaks more of what peace and justice means for us as Carmelites today. In his “New Seeds of Contemplation,” Chapter 16, he said: “To some men peace merely means the liberty to exploit other people without fear of retaliation or interference. To others peace means freedom to rob others without interruption. To still others it means the leisure to devour the goods of the earth without being compelled to feed those whom their feed is starving. And to practically everybody peace simply means the absence of any physical violence... So instead of loving what you think is peace, love other men and love God above all. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed, but hate these things in yourself, not in another.”

So, we can see that as contemplatives called to prayer and contemplation our responsibility for peace and justice begins first within ourselves, searching for and rooting out our own sins against justice. Then, with the light of the Holy Spirit, to work within our family and community. Our “mission” as St. Therese, the Little Flower, showed us is to pray, pray without ceasing. In our prayer, we become children asking the Father for His peace throughout the land. And what two or more ask for together, in Jesus’ name, will be given to us.

**“Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice’ sake,  
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”**

The final beatitude is a natural following from the previous beatitude of peace and justice. For in trying to maintain peace through justice, you will often find rejection and persecution. It may not come in the form of being thrown to the lions, beheaded and burned at the stake, but it will be there equally as painful in its more subtle forms.

This last beatitude, just like the very first one, promises the Kingdom of Heaven as its reward. After all, what is Heaven but God Himself - the first and last - the Alpha and the Omega. And all the beatitudes in between promise God as well through purity, peace, satisfaction, comfort, mercy, and meekness.

This beatitude calls for the cardinal virtue of Fortitude. The fourth Beatitude was about hunger and thirst for justice and required the virtue of Patience, a passive acceptance of God’s will while searching for justice. The sixth Beatitude required the virtue of diligence and perseverance as we steadfastly persisted in our single-hearted search for Love. Now in the eighth Beatitude, we will require a similar but stronger virtue - that of Fortitude. Fortitude is obstinate and unflinching courage, and requires much endurance. Because of the persecution involved in this Beatitude, and because we will now have to face the ultimate challenge, we will need more than passive patience or dogged diligence - we will need guts, stamina, and “true grit.” This virtue entails more aggressiveness than the other two virtues, but not activity in its ordinary sense.

Let us first discuss the various types of persecution for justice’ sake we can encounter, and how this virtue will play its part. How can promoting justice within our family, community, and place of business cause persecution?

See what happens when your children approach you to choose sides in a sibling argument and you, in all justice, take Mary’s doll away from Jane and return it to Mary. Jane will be most upset and insist you don’t love her anymore. Or what about your teenagers, when the youngest feels it should be equal to and enjoy the same privileges as the older, and in your firmness to treat each one as an individual, you will be misunderstood and accused of prejudice? Then, there are parents who love you so much, but find it difficult to let go or make it nearly impossible to choose between their needs and your own; a choice against them could cause hurt feelings and even alienation. And what if we have a spouse and they are involved in something illegal or unethical and we feel morally compelled to speak out against the situation to them and risk becoming a victim of their anger, violence, or even separation?

So far I have only mentioned possibilities within the family, but what about our communities we live in, whether religious, parish, or civil. Injustices can penetrate even the most holy of sanctuaries as often as it does the courts and halls of justice. Whenever we speak out about someone unjustly accused, or openly dispute an erroneous idea, or even refuse to participate in some else’s wrongdoing, you will be risking rejection, alienation, ridicule, and maybe even revenge. Many whose job it is to enforce the law and justice of the land become subject to physical violence, verbal abuse, and possible assassination. Even careers in the Peace Corps often put some in a position to stand up for the principles and rights of the people they serve and, in an alien land, this can bring repression, prosecution, and even death as in the case of the Sisters and lay worker in El Salvador many years ago.

Yes, in order to bravely and courageously defend your principles and proclaim what is just, you will have more than enough share of persecution within a lifetime. Fortitude gives the strength and courage

needed to stand firm during these trials. This is why we should never seek out to create crosses for ourselves unnecessarily. God, in His Wisdom, has ordained that life should supply us with just enough crosses to build our courage, shape our character, temper our spirits, and humble our pride. Let us pray that we have the fortitude and strength to meet the challenges and turn our crosses to graces.

So let us now turn to our Carmelite Saints and Contemporary Contemplatives for their words of advice concerning this.

The first and very important guide for Fortitude (besides Christ Himself) is our Carmelite Mother, St. Teresa of Avila. In the "Book of Her Life" alone, she discussed courage and fortitude 51 times. In reading her life, one can see how this virtue began unfolding in her childhood when she thought about running away to martyrdom with her brother. Then as a teenager recognizing and attempting to rid herself of the seeds of vanity, and later entering the convent only because she felt it would save her soul. She had no idea that God was leading her in this way down the road of perfection and union. It was through subsequent growth in her spiritual life and consolations of the highest degree that persecution entered her life, but at the same time developed her virtue of Fortitude to withstand the trials.

One particular quote is from the "Life," Chapter 31, item 17: "A soul that God permits to advance in this way before the eyes of the world can well prepare itself for martyrdom at the hands of this world,... because if it doesn't want to die to the world, the world will itself put it to death... Seeing the soul begin, the world wants it to be perfect, and at a thousand leagues distance, it thinks something is a fault which perhaps is a virtue... great courage is necessary because the poor soul has not begun to walk, and they want it to be flying." In this early stage of spiritual development, God provides the person with the courage and fortitude needed through consolations so that it will be eager to draw nearer to Him in spite of the difficulties encountered.

Later, as the soul becomes developed and perfected in this virtue, it desires to be more perfect and help others by its experiences by becoming more active in just causes and to reject evil. But in so doing, there will be peoples and powers that will rise up to discredit and intimidate you. In Teresa's "Life," Chapter 32, Item 13, she described the persecution she received in trying to reform her Order. "Hardly had the knowledge of it begun to spread throughout the city when the great persecution... came upon us: gossip, derision, saying it was foolishness... He (God) told me that in this I would see what the saints who had founded religious orders had suffered and that I would have to suffer much more persecution than I could imagine..."

St. John of the Cross also had to suffer much in assisting St. Teresa in the reformation. Before he met Teresa, he had been ridiculed and diverted from his contemplative and interior desires. So much so that he considered leaving the Carmelite Order for a more austere order until he met Teresa who provided him the opportunity and courage to help change and reform the Order. Later, of course, he even suffered prison for pursuing his cause, but through this persecution came the most beautiful Spiritual Canticle. John had a quiet inner fortitude that showed more in his tenacious and persistent spirit and in his intellectual writings.

Another little known Carmelite who is still alive today, but will surely become better known and possibly canonized later is the oldest of the three children of Fatima, Sr. Lucia or Lucy. It is my understanding she became a nun in a different religious order shortly after the death of the younger children partly to get away from the thousands of people who plagued her daily out of either adulation or curiosity. Later, she transferred to the Carmelite Order to become more secluded from the world and

ponder the secrets within. My point is to mention the persecution and suffering imposed on the children while they tried wit, courage and fortitude to deliver the message of Fatima. Maybe the future will reveal a deeper, intimate look at the life of Sr. Lucy and her secrets of Fatima. (Sr. Lucy died on February 13, 2005.)

Let us now quickly consider our other Contemporary Contemplatives before concluding the Beatitudes.

The late Archbishop Martinez, in his book “The Sanctifier,” treated each beatitude as a step up the spiritual ladder to Union, with this Beatitude being the final step. For having suffered persecution for our principles and faith, we become purified as gold - and only pure gold is worthy of direct contact with the Divine Spouse. It is in this union that we obtain the Kingdom of Heaven promised from the beginning and in the final step.

And Father Thomas Merton in his “New Seeds of Contemplation,” Chapter 33, states: “The man who does not permit his spirit to be beaten down and upset by dryness and helplessness, but who lets God lead him peacefully through the wilderness... will be brought to the Promised Land. He will taste the peace and joy of union with God.”

So as we conclude our treatise on the Beatitudes, we can see that each develops our virtues and leads us by our Secular Promise to seek evangelical perfection in the spirit and counsels of the Beatitudes, to ultimate union with God. This is what St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross taught and lived and passed on to us.

Beatitude means blessedness and consummate bliss. Let us pray that by our practice of these eight, we will come to experience this bliss, and God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.