

### On The Way

*The Beatitudes: Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness...*

What do you hunger and thirst for? We all hunger and thirst – that is, *desire* – something. The object of our longing determines who we are. It shapes our thoughts, words, and actions – and eventually our character. When we hunger and thirst for the wrong things – for money, power, fame, control, etc. – we bend ourselves out of shape and become vicious people. Human misery can be reduced to this great sadness, that we long for the wrong things and pursue them with great energy...to our own detriment.

Christianity doesn't deny the reality of human desires. It brings right order to them. To free us from the slavery of misplaced desires, Jesus teaches us the proper object of our longing: *Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.* The word "righteousness" could be translated as "justice" or "holiness." It indicates the right relationship with God. A more literal translation is "*the* righteousness." That definite article keeps us from relativism. This righteousness is something specific, something that comes not from our own choosing or imagining but from God.

This Beatitude speaks of the ultimate object of all human longing, union with God himself. To be blessed means to settle for nothing less than this relationship. The ultimate concern of the blessed is that union. But that's not their *only* concern. The one who hungers and thirsts for the right relationship with God will also desire it for others. The one concerned about holiness is also concerned about justice in the world. We often posit a false dichotomy between love of God and love of neighbor, between personal holiness and social justice. In fact, to hunger and thirst for righteousness necessarily means to be concerned about other right relationships – with others, in society, and with creation.

Further, our Lord says that we *are* blessed, in the present, even as we hunger and thirst. When we see God face to face, *then* we will be satisfied. But now, in our very act of hungering and thirsting for the right relationship with him, we *already* experience his blessedness. Here is an irony of the Christian life, that we are fulfilled, happy, and blessed without having yet attained our goal. None of us has yet reached the perfection of righteousness. But we rejoice in our very longing for it.

Now, we don't hunger and thirst for luxury items. We hunger and thirst for essentials. Jesus speaks of "hunger" and "thirst" because righteousness is essential for our lives, not a luxury. We ought to desire it as much as a starving man desires food and drink. Indeed, the human person starves without this striving for righteousness.

This is the first of the "pursuit" Beatitudes. By the first three Beatitudes, we free ourselves from what constrains us. Now we begin to pursue higher things. So, Saint Augustine associates this Beatitude with the Holy Spirit's Gift of *fortitude*, by which we strive for the good despite difficulties. We choose to hunger and thirst for righteousness rather than settle for the junk food of this world.

Our poverty of spirit is so profound that we need divine assistance to hunger and thirst properly. In this Beatitude, our Lord teaches us externally what we ought to hunger and thirst for. By his grace, he creates in our souls an authentic hunger and thirst for that right relationship with him, who alone satisfies.

– Fr. Scalia