

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE – THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

One day a vast multitude follows our Blessed Lord up a mountain side. They come trooping after Him, men, women and children; their homes, their business, all the cares of this life by common consent left behind; no one to blame them, for all are under the same spell, all attracted by that Form in white moving before them and rising higher and higher up the grassy slope. Now He has stopped and turned round facing them. He waits long and patiently as they come toiling up, guiding them with His hand to go here and there where they may hear Him best.

It is His first great Sermon that He is going to preach, this Sermon on the Mount, and it is not only for the numbers beyond all reckoning gathered together here, but for all that shall come into this world and have to be taught what they must do to save their souls. Therefore He would speak so solemnly and from such a lofty place. He sits down, and the Twelve come and stand around Him, or sit on the ground at His feet. The people press round as close as they can, and when all are seated and quiet He begins to speak. A preacher chooses a text, some sentence which in a few words sums up all he has to say. What will the text of this great Preacher be? What is the thought uppermost in His mind and heart? This—to teach us what we must do to be happy. He knows that we are made for happiness, and that we long to be happy. But He knows, too, that very many try to find happiness in things that will not satisfy them, in the riches, pleasures, and honours of this world which can never content our hearts, because we are made for something much greater and better—for God Himself. And so He tells us in the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount who are really blessed or happy.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land."

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

"Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

"Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Blessed the sufferers for whom Heaven is waiting! this is the text of the Sermon on the Mount.

The poor in spirit are those who, having little of the good things of this life, are content with what God has given them, bear patiently the want of many things they would like to have, and do not envy those who are better off. Those, too, who having a sufficiency or an abundance of the pleasant things of this world, do not let their hearts get too fond of them, are ready to give them up if God should take them away, and are generous in sharing them with those in need. To poor, such as these, our Lord promises all the riches of Heaven by and by.

The meek are those who have gained a mastery over anger and revengeful thoughts. They possess as conquerors three lands—the land of their own soul, which they control as lords and masters, the Land of Heaven, where nothing will trouble them any more, and, strange to say, that very land in which they seemed to be overcome. For in the little

difficulties and differences of daily life, it is those that yield who are really victors. How many conquests has meekness made!" I can convince the Calvinists," said a learned man, "but to convert them I must send them to Francis de Sales," that gentle saint who, by the constant study of the Lamb of God, had so conquered a passionate nature as to become a perfect likeness of Jesus, " meek and humble of heart."

The mourners are those who all their lives long have a quiet, loving sorrow for their sins—not as though they were unforgiven, but just because they are forgiven, because they have offended Him who forgives so readily and so often. Those, too, are blessed mourners who remember when sorrow comes that He who loves them only permits it for their good, and that in a very little while He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and they shall be comforted, " nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more."

Who hunger and thirst- after justice. The soul, like the body, has its hunger and thirst. Our Lord says those are blessed who take care to feed it with those things which keep it alive in the grace of God, with prayer, and instruction, and the Sacraments. Blessed are those who hunger after this spiritual food, who are always trying to get more and more of God's grace, who go hungry to prayer, hungry to Confession and Communion. Almighty God says: "Open thy mouth and I will fill it." And our Blessed Lady sings in her canticle: "He hath fed the hungry with good things." It was because all the saints hungered like this that so much was given them.

The merciful. There is nothing our Lord tells us so often and so plainly as this—that to obtain mercy from God we must ourselves be merciful. If we wish Him to judge us kindly and to forgive our many faults, we must be forgiving and kind. " Be merciful," He says, " as your Heavenly Father is merciful." He tells us that at the Last Day He will say " Come" to those who have been merciful to others for His sake, and "Depart from Me " to those who have been unmerciful to the poor and needy, and therefore to Him. For what we do to His least brethren He counts as done to Himself. If, then, we want to hear His sweet invitation on that dreadful Day, we know how to secure it—"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

The clean of heart. The reward and the joy of the next life is to see God. There are many joys in Heaven freedom from pain and care, the delights of the glorified body, the society of the Angels and Saints, reunion with those we loved on earth. But all these are as nothing compared with the Vision of God. It is this that makes Heaven what it is. Without this all the rest would not satisfy us. But to see the All Holy God we must be holy. In Heaven all are clothed with white robes, and the nearer the approach to the Great White Throne, the more dazzlingly white is the raiment. We must be getting ready to join that spotless throng. How? By taking as much pains to keep our soul free from stain as we do to prevent soiling our dress when we go along a miry road; by shunning with care all mortal sin and deliberate venial sin; by being careful in our examination of conscience, and often cleansing our soul in the Sacrament of Penance, and by frequent acts of contrition. If we do this we shall be among the clean of heart, and one day we shall see God.

The peacemakers. "Some there are who are neither at peace with themselves nor suffer others to be at peace. And some there are who keep themselves in peace and study to restore peace to others." Gladness goes with these peacemakers; they turn aside little words and jokes that would give pain, and come among us like our Blessed Lord whose favorite

word of greeting was: "Peace be to you." They are so like their Father who is in Heaven that they deserve to be called in a special way His children.

The persecuted. If our Lord had not told us these are blessed, should we ever have guessed it? To be persecuted seems such a terrible thing, and so indeed it is unless we can bring ourselves to think more of Him for whose sake we suffer than of the suffering itself. Perhaps we may have known the quiet happiness of being by the side of one we loved who was in pain. The thought that our presence and our sympathy soothed that dear one was greater joy than any pleasure to be found elsewhere. Something like this is the gladness those have even now who for our Lord's sake are hated and persecuted. They know that the thought of their companionship was a consolation to Him when He was on earth, and they know, too, that if they are like Him in His suffering they will be like Him one day in His glory. Are they not blessed then?

And now let us stop awhile to look at our dear Master and His hearers. The Twelve are listening with reverent and fixed attention, their eyes riveted on His blessed face. They are so proud of Him, so proud to be His, so anxious that all should come to know and love Him. The people gaze at Him in amazement and delight. It is all so new, so comforting, so different from the teaching of the rabbis, the scribes and doctors of the Law. They have been taught to hate their enemies, to seek revenge, to think that poverty and suffering are the signs of God's anger, that an abundance of corn and wine and cattle are the rewards for which a good man must hope.

Their beatitudes would have been : "Blessed are the rich and the successful, those that laugh and are held in honour by men." How unlike these to the blessed ones of Jesus of Nazareth! His way to happiness was a hard way, but they knew as they looked up into His face that it was the right way, that He could not deceive them. And they felt that He could not only teach but help them. Had they known the story of His Life as we do they would have seen that He had first practiced all He taught. He was so poor that He had not where to lay His head. He was meek and humble of heart, the Man of sorrows, the great Peacemaker, the Holy One who was to be persecuted even unto death.

After the Sermon our Lord comes down from the Mount, conversing familiarly with His disciples, His simple congregation flocking after Him, trying to get near Him, all so refreshed by His company and His words. Hear them talking of Him among themselves, saying: "We never heard the like." Oh, if we had seen our Blessed Lord as these happy people saw Him, if we had followed Him about with the crowd, had sat at His feet as He taught, and watched Him as He laid His hands on the eyes of the blind and the sores of the poor lepers—how we should have loved Him! He knew that we should want to hear all about Him, and it was to satisfy us that He would have the story of His Life written in the holy Gospels. We must try as we read His Life to bring the scenes before us, to make them real to ourselves, as if it was all going on before our very eyes, as if it was all done for us, as indeed it was, that we may come to know Him better and love Him more.