

## Reflection #10

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

As you prepare your heart for pilgrimage, consider beauty.

When you walk Galilee, you are in a beautiful place.

The rugged hills rise dramatically from the Sea of Galilee; the Sea of Galilee turns purple at sunset with a kind of alpine glow.

There are fishing boats and tour boats making their way; you will venture on one.

Encircling the Sea are small churches, shrines really, to aid the pilgrim in his or her devotion.



Perhaps the most beautiful of all is the Church of the Beatitudes. It is not clear exactly what mountain Jesus went up before he offered the sermon on the mount. Some suggest the “mount” is a metaphor.

Beside the Sea to the west is Mt. Arbel. It is very dramatic. Jesus would have seen Arbel as he walked to and from his home in Capernaum. It would have been close enough to be a day’s journey and removed enough that it would have provided a place to listen.



The shrine to the beatitudes is north of the Sea; it is on the lakeshore. You can see Mt. Arbel from the shrine. Perhaps the site was chosen to encourage the pilgrim. I have driven up to the top of Mt. Arbel and the sights are amazing. Yet, there is something quite fitting about the location of shrine that the mount lacks.

At the shrine to the beatitudes you can listen. Each time I have visited, I have walked away feeling a deep sense of peace. It is as if the place is as beautiful as the teachings Jesus offered.

We know from the gospel of Luke that Jesus also offered beatitudes as he walked around Galilee. Luke's gospel embodies the Greek ideal of education (you walk beside your teacher as he or she offers instruction). Matthew embodies the Jewish tradition (students sit at the feet of the rabbi).

Maybe the shrine the beatitudes is a compromise. You can see Mt. Arbel and you are along the path that circles the sea of Galilee. Hard to say.



What is not hard to say is the enchantment of the shrine. I would encourage you to memorize these six blessings. Know them by heart so you speak them and hear them when you reach the shrine. Be ready to hear them.

The first six beatitudes form a set of stairs. One set goes down; the other goes up. They are much like the six petitions of the Lord's prayer: the first three petitions is heaven coming to earth; the second three is the soul rising from the earth. The first six beatitudes has a similar pattern.

Notice their structure:

Blessed are the poor in spirit  
Blessed are those who mourn  
Blessed are the meek

Blessed are the pure  
Blessed are the merciful  
Blessed who hunger and thirst

Poverty of spirit brings us lower, as does the recognition of our limits, followed by humility. This is known in theology as “mortification”, the dying unto the self.

To hunger for what is right lifts us, as does mercy, followed by purity of heart. This is known as “vivification” in theology, the soul’s rebirth.

Notice how the teachings of Jesus often form an actual path. It is as if the teachings are steps in a journey. Take some time this week to walk these stairs. Set aside some time to consider the moments in your life where you were going toward humility and when you were going toward glory. Each step has so much beauty.

Consider two more pieces of scripture this week as preparation.

The first is a teaching Jesus offers later in the Sermon on the Mount. It is part of the sermon where Jesus takes eight teachings that progressively lead you higher. At the heart of the eight is this teaching:

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

The last scripture is Psalm 123. This is a pilgrim psalm known as an “ascent.”

To you I lift up my eyes,

O you who are enthroned in the heavens!  
As the eyes of servants  
look to the hand of their master,  
as the eyes of a maid  
to the hand of her mistress,  
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,  
until he has mercy upon us.

Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us,  
for we have had more than enough of contempt.  
Our soul has had more than its fill  
of the scorn of those who are at ease,  
of the contempt of the proud.

Consider these images and the motion they embody. Try to imagine yourself “looking” for the Lord.