

The Pure in Heart: Part Two

Essay 8 in the series “The Beatitudes”

In the sixth beatitude, Jesus is saying that those who focus centrally on God will see God. Those who have centered their hearts on God, who are no longer tossed to and fro by every whim of ego and who have overcome their restless passions and desires and all the unstable emotions they arouse, will see God.

God is, in fact, right here. Think of a fourth dimension in which we live and move and have our being. With our 3-D habits of perception, we cannot quite see this. But sometimes we catch a glimpse. The curtain of appearances parts. We sense the breath of God. Right here. Right now. Maybe it's listening to the Atlantic pounding the shores of New England. Maybe it's in an unexpected kindness we receive. Maybe it's in the glee of a three-year-old who knows that he is deeply loved. Maybe it's in the glow that surrounds a bride and groom at their wedding. Maybe it's in a dream at night that we sense was not quite like other dreams. Maybe it's reading in a tradition very different from our own and finding a break-through insight. Maybe it's when words come to us when we have none of our own. Maybe it's in a deep spiritual friendship. Maybe it's acquiring the art of meditation, sitting in stillness, centering our frenzied, cluttered minds, allowing the simple joy of being to wash over us. And we know then what wise people have always known – that all around us is sacred reality.

And now knowing this, we begin to see the simple joys, all the simple gifts that God has surrounded us with and given us. I think of the Louis Armstrong song “What a Wonderful World.” You know the feeling that comes over you when you hear it. That feeling can be yours. Even after all the hard knocks of life, all the loss, all the fear, all the ways society tries to spook us, all the things we have done wrong and all the things we have misunderstood, it is still:

I see trees of green, red roses too,
I see them bloom for me and you,
And I think to myself,
What a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue and clouds of white,
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night,
And I think to myself,
What a wonderful world.

Those who are pure in heart hear the music of the universe everywhere they go. They find satisfaction in the company of whatever people are around them. They see in ordinary things and minds and lives the sacred. They realize that there is beauty and meaning and truth and love and mystery in the world at all times and under all circumstances – that, as Jacob dreamed that night long ago, the gate of heaven is always open. “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.”

So we are invited to enter a world open to the Spirit of God. And now we can trust the flow of our lives whatever happens. We will live every day surrounded by grace, and with this heightened state of consciousness, we will see so much more than we ever thought possible and we will be able to do so much more than we ever imagined.

One of the books discussed at the Interfaith Book Club that meets here was Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*. It's a novel of India, and it tells of happenings in and around a government rest house on the banks of the Narmada River. And all of life's big questions come up. Near the end of the book, a wise old man tells the narrator, "But you have chosen a hard path to knowledge, little brother. Hearsay, not experience." That's true, I think, for most. We have chosen a hard path to knowledge, hearsay, not experience. Hearsay? Scripture? Hmm. Scripture, it is true, is not exactly hearsay; but the truths most people know about Scripture are hearsay. They're what someone else told them Scripture says. And so our spiritual lives depend on this fragile foundation of what others have told us about truth and Scripture when all along our spiritual lives might have depended on a foundation much more secure, knowing God, directly encountering the presence of God.

You see, it's not doctrine first. It's not doctrine first, and then maybe if we're blessed encountering the presence of God. It's encountering the presence of God and then seeing doctrine in that light. It's not knowing about God first and then maybe one day knowing God. It's knowing God first, and then over time working out what it is that we now know about God. Now that we have seen God.

In the words of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-21, it's being strengthened with power through the Spirit of God in your inner being. It's grasping how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. It's being filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. It's waking up to our own oneness with God – to feeling inside us the very life and energy of God. It's experiencing God as Spirit, as a force field that is deeply personal, that penetrates and influences us all, that surrounds and animates us, that calls us into loving connection with all that is, that fills us deeply exactly when we empty ourselves.

But it all comes down to what you're focused on. You always get what you ask for. That, in fact, turns out to be true. The problem is you never know until you get it what it was you were actually asking for.

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

So we are called to see God, to break through all the noise inside our heads: the incessant chatter, our always plaintive, grasping, hungry, dissatisfied egos, our vaguely diffused anxiety, that low-grade but persistently noxious sense of ill ease about little or nothing. The answer, it turns out, is so simple: inner stillness, God's inner stillness, to stop, to center, to focus, and to do this again and again until this is the structure of our heart, pure and undistracted. Revere God. Give God your ultimate trust. Take God with ultimate

seriousness. Make God the center of your lives, the first-thing-in-the-morning, the-last-thing-before-sleeping, the-best-of-times-and-the-worst-of-times center of your lives.

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

Herein lies joy, unshakable joy, bliss, euphoria, a state called beatitude.

– Dale Pauls