

## LIVING FRATERNITY

**Theme: « The Call to Holiness in the Light of the Master »**

In the month of December, we continue working together on some excerpts from Pope Francis' Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, on the call to holiness in today's world. We have chosen three texts from the third chapter that present us with three of the beatitudes.

**Recall:** A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes a communal experience. At the meeting, having a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the Rule and General Constitutions, will provide clarity and depth for our edification and experience.

*Good preparation – Good reflection*

### DECEMBER 2018 MONTHLY MEETING

#### **Introduction**

There can be any number of theories about what constitutes holiness, with various explanations and distinctions. Such reflection may be useful, but nothing is more enlightening than turning to Jesus' words and seeing his way of teaching the truth. Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. So if anyone asks: "What must one do to be a good Christian?" the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives. The word "happy" or "blessed" thus becomes a synonym for "holy". It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness.

#### **Going against the Flow**

Although Jesus' words may strike us as poetic, they clearly run counter to the way things are usually done in our world. Even if we find Jesus' message attractive, the world pushes us towards another way of living. The Beatitudes are in no way trite or undemanding, quite the opposite. We can only practise them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and our pride.

Let us listen once more to Jesus, with all the love and respect that the Master deserves. Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word. We turn now to the individual Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. Mt 5:3-12).

***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”***

The Gospel invites us to peer into the depths of our heart, to see where we find our security in life. Usually the rich feel secure in their wealth, and think that, if that wealth is threatened, the whole meaning of their earthly life can collapse. Jesus himself tells us this in the parable of the rich fool: he speaks of a man who was sure of himself, yet foolish, for it did not dawn on him that he might die that very day (cf. Lk 12:16-21).

This spiritual poverty is closely linked to what Saint Ignatius of Loyola calls “holy indifference”, which brings us to a radiant interior freedom: “We need to train ourselves to be indifferent in our attitude to all created things, in all that is permitted to our free will and not forbidden; so that on our part, we do not set our hearts on good health rather than bad, riches rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, a long life rather than a short one, and so in all the rest”

Luke does not speak of poverty “of spirit” but simply of those who are “poor” (cf. Lk 6:20). In this way, he too invites us to live a plain and austere life. He calls us to share in the life of those most in need, the life lived by the Apostles, and ultimately to configure ourselves to Jesus who, though rich, “made himself poor” (2 Cor 8:9). Being poor of heart: that is holiness.

**Reflection:**

After reading this paragraph, share your thoughts on its content, on how you felt about the explanation of the beatitude. (About 15 minutes)

***“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”***

These are strong words in a world that from the beginning has been a place of conflict, disputes and enmity on all sides, where we constantly pigeonhole others on the basis of their ideas, their customs and even their way of speaking or dressing. Ultimately, it is the reign of pride and vanity, where each person thinks he or she has the right to dominate others. Nonetheless, impossible as it may seem, Jesus proposes a different way of doing things: the way of meekness. This is what we see him doing with his disciples. It is what we contemplate on his entrance to Jerusalem: “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey” (Mt 21:5; Zech 9:9).

Christ says: “Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29). If we are constantly upset and impatient with others, we will end up drained and weary. But if we regard the faults and limitations of others with tenderness and meekness, without an air of superiority, we can actually help them and stop wasting our energy on useless complaining. Saint Theresa of Lisieux tells us that “perfect charity consists in putting up with others’ mistakes, and not being scandalized by their faults”.

Paul speaks of meekness as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:23). He suggests that, if a wrongful action of one of our brothers or sisters troubles us, we should try to correct them, but “with a spirit of meekness”, since “you too could be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Even when we defend our faith and convictions, we are to do so “with meekness” (cf. 1 Pet 3:16). Our enemies

too are to be treated “with meekness” (2 Tim 2:25). In the Church we have often erred by not embracing this demand of God’s word.

Meekness is yet another expression of the interior poverty of those who put their trust in God alone. Indeed, in the Bible the same word – *anawim* – usually refers both to the poor and to the meek. Someone might object: “If I am that meek, they will think that I am an idiot, a fool or a weakling”. At times they may, but so be it. It is always better to be meek, for then our deepest desires will be fulfilled. The meek “shall inherit the earth”, for they will see God’s promises accomplished in their lives. In every situation, the meek put their hope in the Lord, and those who hope for him shall possess the land... and enjoy the fullness of peace (cf. Ps 37:9.11). For his part, the Lord trusts in them: “This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word” (Is 66:2).  
Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness.

### **Reflection and Sharing:**

Take the time to read the preceding paragraphs, share your thoughts on how the explanation signifies meekness and how we can may become meek. Take the necessary time so that all the members can express themselves.

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

This Beatitude makes us think of the many endless situations of war in our world. Yet we ourselves are often a cause of conflict or at least of misunderstanding. For example, I may hear something about someone and I go off and repeat it. I may even embellish it the second time around and keep spreading it... And the more harm it does, the more satisfaction I seem to derive from it. The world of gossip, inhabited by negative and destructive people, does not bring peace. Such people are really the enemies of peace; in no way are they “blessed”.

Peacemakers truly “make” peace; they build peace and friendship in society. To those who sow peace Jesus makes this magnificent promise: “They will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9). He told his disciples that, wherever they went, they were to say: “Peace to this house!” (Lk 10:5). The word of God exhorts every believer to work for peace, “along with all who call upon the Lord with a pure heart” (cf. 2 Tim 2:22), for “the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (Jas 3:18). And if there are times in our community when we question what ought to be done, “let us pursue what makes for peace” (Rom 14:19), for unity is preferable to conflict.

It is not easy to “make” this evangelical peace, which excludes no one but embraces even those who are a bit odd, troublesome or difficult, demanding, different, beaten down by life or simply uninterested. It is hard work; it calls for great openness of mind and heart, since it is not about creating “a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority”, or a project “by a few for the few”. Nor can it attempt to ignore or disregard conflict; instead, it must “face conflict head on, resolve it and make it a link in the chain of a new process”. We need to be

artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill. Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness.

### **Sharing:**

Share your thoughts on the content of these three paragraphs. Take the necessary time so that each member can express themselves. (About 15 minutes)

### **Reflection on the whole of the excerpts presented**

1. How did these excerpts speak to you?
2. Are they ones of hope? Peace? Joy? How and Why?

### **Deepening points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions**

#### **Rule Article 11**

Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life<sup>1</sup>, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.

Thus, in the spirit of “the Beatitudes”, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

#### **General Constitutions Article 15.1**

Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to live the spirit of the Beatitudes and, in a special way, the spirit of poverty. Evangelical poverty demonstrates confidence in the Father, creates interior freedom, and disposes them to promote a more just distribution of wealth.

#### **Life-Objective**

During the month of December, let us live what the beatitudes as well as our Franciscan way of life invites us to be ...

#### **Events and information from the Church and the Order**

Recall the local and regional meetings and activities.

**End of the meeting:** (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

Suggestion: the hymn chosen for Advent (Living with Christ) or another choice

#### **At home**

Take time to read the Gospel according to Mathew 5, 3-12 or Luke 6, 2-21 or even the one from Luke 2, 1-20, the Birth of Jesus.