

What the Spiritual Director Offers: The Lecture

If the Ox-herding pictures allows us to pay attention to our interior world as spiritual directors, the path of the beatitudes gives us a way of offering those who come to us for direction a way of becoming more engaged in their own lives both spiritually and within the world they live.

I offer this way of proceeding for several reasons. First the beatitudes of Matthew's gospel offer a path of being with Christ in the world. They are not a collection of spiritual axioms. They build on each other. Secondly, if your experience is anything like mine when people come for spiritual direction we focus on their spiritual state --as it is lived out interiorly and exteriorly -- at the moment, and we situate it within a historical context. What we do not do is situate it in a spiritual narrative. Their spiritual journey is caught up in their historical journey. What I propose is to situate their path through time within the spiritual stages suggested by the beatitudes. Please note this presentation abridges and simplifies the handout you have already been given.

I am using the Jesus of Matthew's gospel as a spiritual director. He has done his first tour of Galilee. He has experienced the needs and the lives of the people there. His desire is to bring them back to the relationship with the Father that he has with the Father. He tells them.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3-10)

We journey towards God in our daily lives. God also journeys in us to the depths of our being, where we are open and intimate with that compassionate mercy. As the lover and the beloved come close to each other, both are changed. We become more human, and we discover God as if for the first time. The journey through the Beatitudes is a journey into spiritual intimacy, into becoming more and more alive, and into discovering the power of God who desires to let us see and know and love ourselves the way the Trinity sees and knows and loves us all.

In this journey, we are liberated from whatever traps us in false self-images, in destructive relationships, or in stories that distort the truth of our lives. As we walk that pilgrimage, we discover the real cost to ourselves of the malign power in sin and evil. We also become aware of that constant, involved, and creative mercy of God incessantly labouring for us, and for all of creation, to return to intimacy and right

relationship with Him. God does not wait for us to return to Him because we have lost the way. God comes seeking us in ways that give us our freedom and reconstruct our integrity.

This intimacy breaks down the false defenses of the ego so that it becomes aware of its limitations and defects in contrast to the goodness, the mercy, the wisdom, and the life-giving creativity and generosity of God. The path of the Beatitudes reveals the mercy of God in our lives

We will use the path through the Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel to discover our poverty of spirit and God's overwhelming love for us in this state. We will look at the ways we destructively compensate for our poverty of spirit, our felt reality as creatures caught in a changing and uncertain and fickle world. To experience God's love, we are called to enter into those tragic dimensions of our lives. When we do this prayerfully and patiently, we discover the transforming power of God's love. The Beatitudes, which embody the Christian vision, are a powerful way of opening ourselves to conversion.

Most of us live out of our hurts. Praying the Beatitudes transforms those hurts into encounters with God's compassionate mercy. This journey will carry us to experience passionately a love that embraces us into the fullness of life. The personal dimensions we encounter here embody the very brokenness of our lives and God's invitation to hold them up to the power of resurrection.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus Christ is presented as the new Moses leading his people out of slavery through the desert into the promised land. Praying the Beatitudes carries us from the bondage of whatever stops us from being free, with its illusions about freedom, to a life that rejoices in a personal intimacy with God.

To enter the Beatitudes and be carried by them, we must spend time with the first one. This allows us to experience both the degree to which our lives are beyond our control as well as how much we are held and cherished by God. The unfinished business that arises in our prayer from each beatitude carries us in an intensely personal way to the next one. This path leads to an ever-deeper awareness of the presence of God in our lives. Allow enough time to enter into the dynamics of each beatitude. Each is a blessing that reveals its depths only in patience and prayerful reflection. The love that surrounds us will reveal what we need to know and do. This first beatitude describes the human condition and God's gift to us as we truly are.

[1] Blessed are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of God

We are creatures. We are daily subject to large forces outside of our control. We have little control over these areas of our lives. Often we prefer to hide from this poverty and from the fact that we are truly broken people. We are broken intellectually, physically, emotionally, spiritually, communally. Today we are asked to take time to acknowledge the brokenness in our lives – the brokenness that is our life. We put aside,

gently but firmly, the illusions we have of being whole, and stop pretending that we are God. Truly we are the emptiness that only God can fill.

Before we can be filled, we must admit our poverty. When we do this, we open ourselves to the path that leads to the kingdom of God. Instead of viewing our poverty as a horror and a burden, we may see it as a door that we need to walk through. We need to be led and carried by our poverty to the wounded places where we are raw, vulnerable, naked. There we contact our own poverty, other people's poverty, and the poverty of the world. Poverty allows us to discover community, which is the kingdom of God in our midst.

Poverty of spirit is the radical awareness of our nothingness and of our dependence on Divine Providence for health, approval, image, identity, friendship, even life itself. To enter into poverty of spirit is to enter the realm where we are stripped of illusions. Poverty of spirit sentences us to death, beyond the awareness of our mortality. When we live out of that poverty, the unexpected happens.

We see every moment as a gift, a luxury. Every moment is one of pure wonder. Such poverty cuts a lot of nonsense out of our lives. Because we cannot compromise that poverty, we do not need to defend ourselves, or sacrifice ourselves to maintain false images. We can be simple and tolerant in our suffering and the suffering of others.

A good spiritual director allows those who come for direction to experience and accept their poverty of spirit WITHIN the context of God's love. If people try to do that in any other context then they fill up their poverty with idols and ideologies.

The discipline of poverty is to remain empty. Living out of that emptiness one comes to the awareness of the constant presence of God in one's life in the surprising forms of Divine Providence. That awareness changes our self-image and our expectations of others. It changes the way we imagine the world. We become flexible; we can risk; we learn to trust we will be looked after. We become free. We focus on that first commandment given in Mark's Gospel. "The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12: 29-31).

Living our poverty of spirit allows us to focus on God. Here we can simply and shamelessly be passionate with God, and to allow God to be simply and shamelessly passionate with us, even in our bodies. Right here and right now.

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When we enter our poverty of spirit, we discover that there are aspects of our lives that trap us and stop us from living joyfully, simply, and compassionately. We need to be liberated from these. The second beatitude offers us the next step in that liberation.

[2] Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

To mourn is to acknowledge death and the call to a life beyond death. Mourning is the movement to resurrection, where we are saved, not by anything we have done or can do – not even by our hope – but by the generosity of God. In mourning, we let go of our dead into the shaping spirit of the One who forms us all. Mourning is our responsibility to the dead. In mourning them, we are present to them and allow God to reach through us to touch them. Mourning reminds us that we, living and dead, are still being created.

That process of creation is a constant transformation. When we hold onto the dead, or allow the dead to hold onto us, we stop that work of transformation and creation. We reject God's gift of creativity in our lives and in our world.

To mourn, then, we must first acknowledge the presence and effect of the dead in our lives. To remember the dead only as they were is to create a tomb for ourselves; it equates this life with all that they are. But that is not all they are. They are now even more embraced by a love that transforms them as they accept it. If we fail to believe this, and so often we do, then we fear to mourn, and we hold on to a past that no longer is. We seek ways to pretend that is dead is alive. The only way this is possible is to become dead ourselves. We become trapped by a past that gives no present or future life. So imprisoned, we deny life to ourselves and to those around us.

Our dead is not necessarily only people. Our dead can include dreams, hopes, ideals, past ways of living or past relationships. Our fear of abandonment, our desire for the security we once knew, is a form of despair that, in reality, death is the end. Then death manifests itself in our cynicism, our despair, our rigidity, our self-righteousness. Existing this way we do not bring life to others, but rather take it away. The basis of this is fear. Such a fear denies that God is stronger than death and more compassionate and life-giving than we are.

We must first look at the ways we are trapped by fear. This can only be done in the context of a love that holds us securely. Our prayer at this time offers us that love. Then, we can become conscious of the ways the dead influence our perceptions, our ways of thinking and acting. We can fight against this awareness or we can welcome it. In so doing, we begin to realize how our traditions – personal, family, cultural, religious – affect us. Tradition is the handing on of life and of spirit. Some aspects of our tradition free us; other aspects do not. We are asked always to choose life and to hand on life.

We are asked to hand over to resurrection what traps us in death. Then we will see death as part of life, rather than living life as part of death. When we acknowledge the presence of the dead and their effect on our lives, we become aware of the work we must do in our desire for liberation. We note that we ourselves cannot transform death into life. Resurrection is always a gift from God. But we can dispose ourselves for resurrection by accepting the love that raised Christ from the dead. That love did not resuscitate the dead Christ, but transformed the dead Christ into a new creation. This same love does not bring our dead back to life, but transforms our dead into a new life. Our work is to bring the dead to that transforming love.

We offer the dead our mutual path to the resurrection, where the fullness of life is possible only when all of creation comes together as one in joy and in the shared gratitude of being redeemed into a common life. For to mourn is to enter into community; the comfort offered to those who mourn is the growing realization that the very act of mourning is also the act in which resurrection happens. Mourning creates joy. Mourning transforms grief into hope. Mourning transforms suffering into pain. Mourning is quite different from grief. Grief kills. It transforms suffering into a violence to oneself, to others, and to the gift of life. In grieving we become aware of loss and of the fragility of the “world” in which we live and find our meaning. We need to admit our inability to maintain that world. It is our poverty of spirit. And in grieving, we live with the fragments of that world and with the empty spaces between those fragments that nothing can fill. Grief kills. Mourning brings life. When we mourn we bring all our grief to God. The empty spaces may not change but in allowing them to remain empty, rather than filling them with regrets, or nostalgia, or forms of wistful thinking, we give new life the opportunity to appear. While grief isolates, mourning reminds us that we are creatures, subject to change and impermanence, and we all have this in common with each other. Mourning brings us into community.. and I suppose that is one reason why wakes are so important.

When we mourn, we discover a certain liberation. This manifests itself in a loss of fear, a certain flexibility in our attitudes, the ability to delight in what is given as gift without clinging to it. But we also discover those elements in our lives that refuse to let us be free. They do violence to us, and we are tempted to do violence back to them in our struggle to be free. Because we are not always conscious of them, they also incite us to be violent in our relationships with other people. The third beatitude addresses this issue of violence, because, as Christ has pointed out, “The kingdom of heaven is overtaken by violence; the violent bear it away” (Matthew 11:12). Violence destroys the community love seeks to create.

[3] Blessed are the gentle; they shall inherit the earth

We are all vulnerable. If we were to meditate on our vulnerability, we would discover in ourselves opposing tensions in our living out of our vulnerability. Such vulnerability can breed fear when we internalize the forces that threaten us. The fear creates alienation when we understand the “other” to be inimical to our well-being, and the alienation manifests itself in violence as we try to defend that space in which we find our identity. Then “the kingdom of heaven is taken by violence and the violent destroy it” (Matthew 11:12).

But there is another approach to being vulnerable. Vulnerability opens us to the dimensions of Divine Providence in our lives when we realize, in examining our very histories, that we are not destroyed, but instead are saved in spite of ourselves. The awareness of our lives being held in God’s care moves us to gratitude, especially when grasp how easily we can be destroyed. This spirit of gratitude manifests itself in the gentleness with which we deal with ourselves, others, and the world. We do not have to

be violent to maintain ourselves. God's power comes "to save all the meek of the earth" (Psalm 76:10).

To be gentle is, first of all, to face not only our vulnerability, but also the horror, the abject nakedness, and the blind misery that masquerade as the powers of this world, without becoming paralyzed or trapped by fear – our own or others'. To be gentle calls us to be attentive (as opposed to blind) to the forces that comprise our world; to be discerning, insightful, political and flexible in dealing with these forces; and to be responsible – rather than reactive – for the transformation of the oppressor and the oppressed. To be gentle calls us to dance in the flames, and in the ashes, and in the hard places of this life. The witness of this gentleness lies neither in our devotion to an ideology of social justice nor in withdrawal from the arenas of social effect. It lies in the manifest joy of knowing with our own body the presence of the powers of good that are holding, protecting, affirming, and guiding us along the path that is salvation.

This joy allows us to see, in the cracks and the terrors of this world, the promise of paradise. It invites us to co-operate with the powers of good by being present, humbly and gratefully, at precisely those places, so that through our simple presence, the mystery we call God can enter the world.

It is always shocking to discover the violence that is in us, and the violence that is around us. In fact, we have become so accustomed to violence that we might consider it a normal part of living, and characteristic of being human. But when we discover how much of our lives are caught up in violence, from which there seems to be no escape, we feel helpless and overwhelmed. We cry out for a different reality. We cry out for conversion. Those who hunger and thirst for such a transformed world, and who place themselves on the path to such a life, enter into the work of the fourth beatitude.

[4] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice; they shall be satisfied

The practice of freedom lies in the midst of evil, not beyond it. If our choices enslave anyone, we are not free. The freedom that liberates is generated through God's saving activity. God's constant creativity establishes and maintains our abiding intimacy in that relationship, here and now, even in the midst of the suffering caused by the aggressions of narcissism. God's love for us sets us free to choose and to be responsible. . When we are rooted in that love, we may strive for the justice that liberates all. True justice comes only from justification. As we accept that everyone is loved – even when we sin – we approach what it means to be justified. Otherwise, our understanding of justice remains fallen, defined in terms of recompense, and of contract and social norms. Then our commitment to justice, on whatever level – personal, communal, social, or cultural – is maintained within the boundaries of self-knowledge and self-interest. This is the position of the Pharisees and the Zealots. It is the position of those who destroy others, and even themselves, to maintain what they think is right.

Such a position denies the depths of what it means to be human. First, it denies the pervasiveness of sin in our lives, so that we are even blind to our blindness. Second, below the manifestations of that sin, it denies the constant hunger we are for God. Moreover, it manipulates people's hunger for God into accepting ideologies, cult and ritual, through guilt and repression as a means of salvation. But we are not saved by the word of the law, whether religious or secular. We are saved only by the Giver of the spirit that finds some inadequate expression in the law. Our hunger is not satisfied by the law, but in a relationship with the living Word under whose Cross we find our life. To hunger and thirst for salvation is to commit to that life, not only for ourselves, but for all. It is to experience the agony of the passion as we struggle with all of our energies so that the fullness of life may be tangibly present to all in the sacrament of daily life.

On the Cross, Christ is at his most creative. In this act, he overcomes those powers that, in their blindness, self-service, and malice, attempt to prevent life from being given to all who desire it. When we hunger and thirst for God, we hunger and thirst for a set of relationships for everyone in which the only criterion is mutual love. In John, Jesus prays to the Father for his companions, "that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one" (17:22-23).

The justice we embody is the witness of the justification we experience. How we treat ourselves and others manifests not only what we love, but how we love. That love is where we put our lives. St. Ignatius says that "love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words"; he continues "the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses" (Sp. Ex. #230:1, 231:2). When we hunger and thirst for justice we live our poverty in a way that allows the mercy of God to be manifest through us. We experience that desire even in our bodies, for our bodies are how we are in this world. We incarnate our desire with our bodies. Our desire is for the community of love that includes all without exception. That desire is met and embraced by God's desire to create that community of love. That passion the Father has for the world makes us also his living words in the circumstances in which we find (and lose) ourselves.

We desire to be saved because we cannot save ourselves. When we follow the path of that desire, we allow God to come to us, and through us, into the world. The joy and gratitude we experience when that happens embolden us to continue God's mission in the world, because we discover we are all one.

When we experience the gift of being loved, we start to see how destructive violence is. We realize how that love loved us even when we were unloving, even when we were violent in our inability to love. This is the experience of mercy. It renders us merciful to those we encounter who have not yet experienced this gift. We give what we have received. In that giving, we enter deeper into the kingdom by making it more available to all.

[5] Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

Mercy is absurd. It is neither prudent nor politic. It has no aims, expects no rewards and is not self-congratulatory. It strives to love its enemies, expecting nothing in return. In this it imitates God, who is “kind to the ungrateful and the selfish” (Luke 6:36). The merciful are always aware that God is good to us even as we sin, and so come to realize that God’s justice is his mercy, his constancy of help, and his patience, which manifests itself in the gift of time. That mercy is not pity, which sees the suffering of the other and is only interiorly moved by it. Human mercy, like divine mercy, goes out of itself to transform the suffering of the sinner. Human mercy flows as an act of gratitude at having itself experienced divine mercy. That gratitude covenants God and man. That spirit of gratitude does not abet sin, but strives to bring those trapped in sin to the truth of their lives – the acceptance of the fact that they are loved, and that, in the circumstances of their lives, they can be loving.

The merciful are not judgmental. They know what it is to be trapped and what it is to be freed from those traps, and how easily, but for the constant support of God, they may be trapped again. Their personal history makes them attentive to the broken of the world, whether rich or poor, powerful or weak, shamed or shameless. It gives them the lived experience from which they can distinguish between “want” and “need,” and allows them to respond to the need in people’s lives. They realize the interconnectedness of all life, and the desire of all to be rooted in that interconnectedness. It is to realize everything concerns us and evokes our compassion.

Yet we cannot do everything; the attempt to do everything denies us mercy. We can do only what we have been gifted to do. Our gifts are at the service of those we meet on our daily path. We are to be as open doors through which the world’s needs meet God. In every encounter that need is manifest because no one is fully saved until all are fully saved. The preferential option for the poor recognizes the poverty in everyone and addresses it as Jesus did in his gospel life, scandalizing the self-righteous, who were blind to their own needs and thus blind to the needs of others (Matthew 25:34-40).

We can never be as merciful as we would wish, but we can be merciful as we are, with the little we have. In sharing that poverty, we discover what it means to be human. For the hard heart which cannot be hurt cannot love, either. To be merciful is to take the risk that one will be taken advantage of, be made a fool of. Indeed, this is often the case if we are concerned with self. But if we give what we have been given, this is never the case. It is easy to abuse God’s gifts. Human history is the history of such abuse. Yet God does not stop giving; our history is also one of salvation. Mercy is rooted in the absurdity of love – of being loved and of being offered the opportunity to love. It is expressed as gratitude for that felt knowledge.

We are never fully converted, and will never be until every aspect of creation is fully united to God, because every aspect of creation, including ourselves, is interconnected. But we are on our way, and along our way, through our acts of mercy, we offer to all the gift of living in God. When we live this way we are turned towards God. Then we desire

God and we desire to find God in all things and all persons, and in all the circumstances of our lives. To live this way is to be pure of heart. Jesus, in the sixth beatitude, assures us that as we live our lives this way, as we walk this path, we shall embrace God, our beloved.

[6] Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God

Our deepest desire is from God. Our deepest desire seeks God in all things. That desire directs our spiritual path. In the course of living our lives, we discover that we are shaped by many desires, and we seek discernment: which desires lead to the building up of the kingdom of God and which do not. The manifestations of our deepest desire move us to be companions of Christ. Those other desires are energies, or patterns of energy, that have somehow become detached from our deepest desire and lead a separate existence. They can be identified by that separation. Consolation occurs when our desires harmonize with the energies of the Spirit; joy occurs when our energies harmonize with those of those around us; happiness occurs when those energies surrounding us harmonize with ours; pleasure occurs when those energies submit to us.

The range between consolation to desolation is from community to narcissism. To be pure in heart is to be on the path to integration where all the energies of our life – spiritual, social, communal, personal, emotional, intellectual, sexual – are woven together by our deepest desire. That deepest desire carries us beyond our present sense of self into truer and more intimate modes of being with others. The focus of that path is on relationship rather than ritual, on prophesy rather than professionalism. The integrity of the weave of those energies makes no distinction between private and public, between self and other. To be pure in heart is to realize the unity of all that exists and to value all that exists. This unity includes the energies that comprise the self, and this unity manifests singleness of purpose. As we move on the path of purity of heart, we discover a singleness of purpose that makes us flexible to the Spirit. That union of spirit – the passion for community – carries us to those places where displaced and separated energies come to light. Then we endure the exorcisms of encountering a love that reweaves those straying energies into a simpler and more integrated life

The trials of living this way embody the struggle between narcissism and community. As we walk the path and struggle for that more total integration we discover that nothing human is foreign to us. Such self-awareness makes us humble; in that humility, we become more and more disposed to the dance of the energies, more open to the darkness in which God dwells, where we see first not with the eyes, but with the heart.

What the heart sees is that everything that exists is holy. To be pure in heart is to enter into the struggle of creation, in which everything is involved. It is to realize that call to holiness in all the circumstances of life. Evil is fragmented holiness; the task of the pure in heart is the careful gathering up of those fragments into unity – the unknotting of the tangled energies that hold us in the bondage of compulsion and oppression. The pure of heart, by the simple act of being present, heal the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted,

give sight to the blind, set free the enslaved, and announce to the world the presence of God among us, so that they can freely enter into the play and the delight of the life where God dwells.

As the pure of heart walk towards God, they gather up the broken, the disaffected, the alienated, and the fearful, along with the rich, the powerful, the gifted, the lucky, in an open community of common affection, mutual sharing, and respect. It is the work of the peacemaker to help create and maintain such communities. They are the kingdom of God on earth.

[7] Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called the children of God

Hatred destroys not only the other but also us. In maintaining hate we sacrifice ourselves to the lie that the enemy deserves to die. This war, breeding more war, "is only a cowardly escape from the problems of peace" (Thomas Mann). The only way to overcome an enemy is to make the enemy a friend. The problem of peace is how to make an enemy a friend. To make peace is to move beyond apathy or tolerance. To make peace is to create community. Community is created when we live in such a way that the energies of all are allowed positive expression. It is a question of imagination.

Because we live in imagined worlds, what we imagine as real defines how we relate with others. When we indulge ourselves to imagine the world, instead of allowing ourselves to live as God imagines us, we follow the path of fantasy. And, as Yeats, in his poem "The Stare's Nest by My Window," observed of those fighting against each other in the civil war in Ireland,

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare

Before we can create community, we need to ask what fantasies shape our lives and, further, what forces in our lives maintain those fantasies. If we see only through the filter of our hurts – rather than the call to creativity that gives us our vision – we project onto those we hate what has hurt us and what we deny in our own lives. We know these exist because they trap us and we experience feelings of hate.

We become peacemakers only as we make peace with ourselves, only as we acknowledge the hurt in our life, through a healing of memories and sensibilities within the vision that gives our life meaning. That vision emerges when we accept that we are all held in the compassionate mercy of God, and that no one is outside of that mercy. This meaning becomes real in our lives. not in terms of satisfaction. but through the modes of consolation. In consolation we are redefined. not according to fantasy. but through an immediate openness to God. That state "without any previous cause" moves us beyond our boundaries to a new awareness of reality in which what we consider impossible is possible. In this openness, the enemy can become the friend. This openness does not manipulate the other into becoming a friend. The other is always free to choose. Even self-sacrificing love – radical openness – does not make the other

free. But it is the most we can do. We can love our enemy without indulging our enemy's destructiveness, and hope for the best. This is our calling as human beings. We love each other, or we die.

Christ, the peacemaker, comes to show us how to reconcile ourselves to God, to each other, to ourselves, and to all the forces of creation. Reconciling the estranged is Christ's mission. He does it by showing that we all have a common source, the Father, and that we are all one in that same Father. We, Christ's companions, inherit that same mission from God, according to today's beatitude. Community can be built only if persons share a common vision in which everyone maintains a common good. That common good is manifested differently according to different gifts, but underlying these differences is the same spirit and a common vocation. The dynamics of integration required to be a person of peace are also necessary to be a community. Prayer, dialogue, openness, intimacy, and celebration, create life. The path of the peacemaker leads to the broken and hard places of our own life, community, and world. It takes up the Standard and Cross of Christ, our brother. We stand in those places, simply and humbly, as open doors, in our poverty of spirit.

As open doors, we allow the mercy of God to enter the world, and allow the pain of the world to pass through us to be held by that transforming love of God.

To be a peacemaker is to enter the dark and dangerous places of life where there is conflict, violence, separation, and distrust, and to allow ourselves to be an instrument of God's mercy there. It is to be a prophet. The hope and life offered by peace run counter to the powers of evil that seek destruction and despair. They turn against the peacemaker in violence. Because evil is not creative, the pattern of its destructiveness is the same throughout the ages. The lives of prophets witness their intimacy with a power greater than evil. They have found that intimacy by walking the path of the Beatitudes. They have found a love they offer to the world.

[H] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake

When our hearts are filled with longing for the kingdom, that longing shapes everything we do. We hold values different from the world's, trust what the world neither sees nor believes in and, then, because we are judged as "other," we become the objects of derision, or fear, or hatred. A Hasidic tale tells of a house where there was a wedding festival. The musicians sat in a corner and played their instruments, the guests danced to the music and were merry, and the house was filled with joy. But a deaf man passed outside of the house; he looked in through the window and saw the people whirling about the room, leaping, and throwing about their arms. "See how they fling themselves about!" he cried. "It is a house filled with madmen!" For he could not hear the music to which they danced.

To be possessed of the desire only for God is to be judged crazy or eccentric, like Francis of Assisi stripping naked in the public square of his father's town. It is to be accounted dangerous by the moral guardians of society, as when the Inquisition imprisoned Ignatius of Loyola, who asserted that God could be found in this world. This hunger for God makes us fools for Christ's sake, and lets us share in the passion the Father has for his Son and in the passion the Son has for the Father. That passion to say yes to life, to make the leap of faith in every moment of life, and to return to the marketplace bearing gifts is the Spirit.

The path of the Beatitudes always returns us filled with the Spirit to a world to be transformed. We leave that world because it does not satisfy our needs; in that journey, we discover the dead we carry with us and experience the humility of the powerless who have been saved. The zeal our transformation engenders is tempered into a mercy that makes us one with God in compassion for the world. Living compassionately in this world, we manifest the prophetic presence, being living words of God, companions of Jesus. In each stage of the path, there are trials to be endured. Each stage brings a death and a resurrection. Then, like Paul, "We rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

Through the Beatitudes, our devotion becomes the sacrifice making the world holy, and unites us in the embrace of God. In living that embrace, we live not for ourselves or through ourselves. When we fully commit ourselves to life, the lives we lead are Revelation for others. Then, Christ lives in us and through us.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall it be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light shine before all, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)

Our desire is that all may have life and have it to the fullest. In that desire for fullness of life, every death is embraced so that it becomes the door to a deeper and fuller life. This life is a gift always offered to everyone.

Conclusion:

When we enter our poverty of spirit prayerfully, we move towards liberation. In that movement we discover the traps that stop us from experiencing gratitude at being embraced by God. So we pray to be liberated from those traps, the deaths that take away our joy. As we pray to mourn, we discover more freedom. That freedom allows us to admit that there are still areas in our life where the dead have taken over and we are

possessed by violence. We pray to have that violence transformed into creativity, and discover the creativity that seeks conversion of heart. When we discover our lack of conversion in so many areas, we cry out to God for mercy. Knowing what it is to be a sinner, we judge no one else. In fact, we then work to bring ourselves and all to that simple path where we acknowledge that not only we, but all, are loved and lovable. This purity of heart makes us peacemakers, makes us willing to enter into the struggle for a world where all can live their identities as “the beloved.” Such a struggle is not without its sufferings, but we accept those sufferings in union with Christ and all who do good, because that creativity is the expression of our identity. It witnesses to the meaning of our lives. It allows us to restore, and re-story, the world as imagined by God.

The path through the Beatitudes makes us co-creators of the community that extends through all time and all space, and incorporates everyone and everything. Here all are loved and can share love freely and simply and joyfully. To walk this path is to open and live the gift of intimacy with a God who desires us.

As spiritual directors we are called to help people live the Beatitudes. I would suggest using the Beatitudes as a way of focusing the attention of those who desire spiritual direction. They work.