

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Blessed Are You

Most of us, I suspect, will admit to a feeling of beatitude or blessedness *some of the time*. Some happy people never lose this feeling; they are a fountain of life for the less favoured people about them: always looking instinctively for the good in their situation, and upheld by the founding sense of their own value. To most of us, the three words at my title this week need to be repeated constantly if we are not to forget them. So the Beatitudes from this week's Gospel say over and over again, *blessed are you*.

Yes, Really, I Mean *You!*

The question is, can I find this blessedness in the reality of my own life? The first thought I have is, that there isn't any *merit* in being blessed. The sort of language modern pundits use, when unhappiness is brought to their attention, is terribly hard and implies that unhappiness is always our own fault. There is some religious language like that too. I don't think God wants to say this to us. He never says *Get a life!* Rather, he wants to announce to us that there *is* happiness for us, that we are indeed blessed people. And this blessedness lies, not in our possessions, or our good qualities - not in anything that human beings can measure - but simply in our dignity as people God has chosen to live in his presence. This is the inexhaustible truth which can sustain us through everything which contradicts it (and there are plenty of opposing voices, in a hard world).

Blessed, Whatever The Odds

The Beatitudes in Matthew's *Sermon on the Mount* do not steer clear of their contradiction by the world. It is not the rich who find the door into blessedness, but the poor. I've found poverty is a tough place to experience blessedness. It tells us that others have little value for us, or that the world is too mean to enrich us or reward us. Poverty can be a bitter experience, especially if it is accompanied by (for instance) loneliness. By contrast, poverty that is shared in an atmosphere of love can be a wonderful experience. It becomes clear what is truly precious, when materially poor people are rich in the gift of themselves generously shared. Again, it is not those who are *left alone* by the powers-that-be who find their blessedness, but those who are *persecuted in the cause of right*. We think blessedness goes together with peace; but what we call peace is so often idleness or insignificance, being left alone. Blessedness can reach its perfection only in a state

of closeness to God, and the world is so far from God, that Jesus warns us we cannot be happy in the world's terms at the same time as inheriting the kingdom of heaven. We must re-examine our irksome wounds and bruises, and see whether we are in a position to qualify for the happiness the Beatitudes promise. Do we have just that poverty, hunger, and gentleness that can make us heirs of the kingdom? Do we have them without having recognized their meaning, like people who have overlooked their lottery win? There are those who are told their blessedness only at the Last Judgment. But the Beatitudes break the news now. They act as a key to our real situation, teaching us how to sniff out the truth here, today.

The Secrets Of The Kingdom

Jesus himself uses this phrase about the parables. I use it about the heirs of God. They starve in famine-fields, toil in sweat-shops, suffer in prisons. They are betrayed and abused, representing the Crucifix in myriads of forms. But they are still the true heirs of the royal power of God. If the earth tries to disinherit them now, it cannot condemn them in God's eyes. They have amazing reserves of endurance and indomitable humanity; there is community amongst them that has silenced and humbled those privileged to know it. They shall inherit the earth.
Fr Philip