

When Jesus declares, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” he is not speaking first about material poverty. He is revealing a relational and theological truth. The poor in spirit know that everything they have is received from God, and because they trust this, they are free to return everything to him. They do not fear losing themselves in the gift, because they know that God will meet their surrender with his own self-gift.

This is lived most perfectly in the life of our Blessed Mother. Mary is poor in spirit in the deepest sense: she gives herself entirely to God’s plan because she trusts that, in doing so, God is giving her nothing less than himself. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Mary does not secure her future before saying yes to God. She entrusts her future entirely to him. She does not give from security; she gives without it. This is what it means to be poor in spirit.

Having said that, those who lack material resources have an advantage, in that they don’t have a false sense of security like the rest of us. Mary speaks in her Magnificat from within the world of the poor. God “has looked upon the lowliness (ταπείνωσις) of his servant.” He “has filled the hungry with good things,” and he has “sent the rich away empty.” Mary does not describe herself as someone who was rich and then became generous. She describes herself as lowly—emptied—whom God has exalted. In other words, Mary does not possess God’s promise; she receives it. And she receives it precisely because she is empty enough to do so.

That is the key for all of us, to place our trust in God and not in possessions, power, and prestige.

Jesus declares blessed those who are poor in spirit because this poverty is open, receptive, and dependent. Notice something striking in the Beatitudes: most of them point toward a future fulfillment. Those who mourn will be comforted. The meek will inherit the land. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. The merciful will be shown mercy. The clean of heart will see God. The peacemakers will be called children of God.

But the poor in spirit are different. They do not wait for the Kingdom. They possess it now. And the Kingdom of God is not an idea or a reward. The Kingdom of God is a person—Jesus himself. He has a special place in his heart for the poor in spirit because they are open to being filled by him. And when Jesus fills a heart, he fills it with his love and his peace.

Peace does not mean the absence of difficulties. It means the assurance that God's grace will be sufficient in the present situation. It means I do not have to fear that this problem will destroy me, because God will lift me up and satisfy me in my poverty.

Fr. Simeon Leiva-Merikakis writes that “poor in spirit” could be translated more graphically as: “How fortunate are those who beg for their life’s very breath.” Every moment of our lives is a gift from God. We did nothing to earn it. The poor in

spirit recognize their complete dependence upon God and, like Mary, are therefore able to offer their lives to him without reserve.

And what they often discover is this: God almost always returns the gift—but not before blessing it and multiplying it beyond what they imagined. The poor in spirit are not preoccupied with accumulating possessions or securing a future without worry or doubt. They are free, because their security rests not in what they control, but in whom they trust.

Where in my life am I still holding back? Where am I trying to secure myself before trusting God? What would it look like for me—today—to become poor enough for God to act? To be poor in spirit does not mean having nothing. It means offering everything. It means placing our plans, our fears, our finances, our relationships, and our future into God's hands and saying, with Mary, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

And when we do, we discover the great paradox of the Gospel: that in emptying ourselves before God, we are filled; in trusting without guarantees, we find peace; and in becoming poor in spirit, we receive the Kingdom—here and now.