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"The way of the beatitudes is an Easter path"

In his Wednesday audience on 29 April, Pope Francis concluded his catechesis on the beatitudes by offering reflections on the last one.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With today's audience, we conclude our journey into the evangelical Beatitudes. As we have heard, the last one proclaims the eschatological

joy of those persecuted for righteousness' sake. This Beatitude announces the same happiness as the first one: the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the persecuted as it does to the poor in spirit. We thus understand that we have reached the end of our joint journey revealed in the previous proclamations.

The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who thirst for holiness, mercy, the pure in heart and peacemakers may lead to persecution because of Christ. However, ultimately this persecution is a cause of joy and of great reward in heaven. The way of the Beatitudes is an Easter path that leads us from a life in accord with the world to one of God, from a life led by the flesh — that is by selfishness — to one guided by the Spirit.

With its idols, its compromises and its priorities, the world cannot accept

this kind of life. The “structures of sin”^[1] that are often produced by the human mind, and are extraneous to the Spirit of truth that the world cannot receive, (cf. Jn 14:17), cannot but reject poverty or meekness or purity and declare life according to the Gospel as a mistake and a problem; thus as something to isolate. This is what the world thinks: “These [people] are idealists or fanatics...”. This is how they think.

If the world lives as a function of money, then anyone who demonstrates that life can be lived in [self] giving and sacrifice becomes a nuisance to the system of greed. This word “nuisance” is key because Christian witness, which is so good for many people who follow it, bothers those who have a worldly mindset. They see it as chastising. When holiness appears and the life of the children of God emerges, there is something uncomfortable in that

beauty that demands taking a stance: either to allow oneself to be questioned and to open oneself to the good or reject that light and harden one's heart, even until oppression and fury (cf. Wis 2:14-15). It is interesting and striking to note how hostility grows to fury in the persecution of martyrs. Just look at the persecutions of the last century, of the European dictatorships: how does one get to rage against Christians, against Christian witness and against the heroism of Christians?

But this demonstrates that the tragedy of persecution is also the place of liberation from subjection to the success, vainglory and compromise of the world. What makes those who are rejected by the world because of Christ rejoice? They rejoice at having found something that has more value than the entire world. Indeed: "For what does it

profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mk 8:36). What is the advantage there?

It is painful to recall that in this very moment, there are many Christians in various parts of the world who are suffering from persecution, and we must hope and pray that their trials will soon end. They are many: today's martyrs outnumber the martyrs of the first centuries. Let us express our closeness to these brothers and sisters. We are a single body and these Christians are the bleeding limbs of the body of Christ who is the Church.

But we also have to be careful not to read this Beatitude from a self commiserating, victimized perspective. In fact, mankind's contempt is not always synonymous with persecution: indeed shortly later, Jesus tells Christians that they are the “salt of the earth” and warns

against the danger of “losing their taste” because in that case, salt “is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men” (Mt 5:13). Thus, when we lose the taste of Christ and the Gospel, there is also contempt which is our fault.

We have to be faithful to the humble way of the Beatitudes because it leads us to be of Christ and not of the world. It is worth remembering the journey of Saint Paul. When he thought he was a righteous person, he was in fact a persecutor, but when he found out he was a persecutor, he became a man of love who rejoiced in the suffering of the persecution inflicted on him (cf. Col 1:24).

If God grants us the grace to be more like the Crucified Christ and joined to his Passion, then exclusion and persecution are the manifestation of new life. This life is the same as the

life of Christ who was “despised and rejected” for us men and women and for our salvation” (cf. Is 53:3; Acts 8:30-35). Welcoming his Spirit can lead us to have so much love in our heart as to offer our life for the world without making compromises with its deceit and accepting its rejection.

Compromises with the world are dangerous: Christians are always tempted to make compromises with the world, with the spirit of the world. This — rejecting compromises and journeying on the way of Jesus Christ — is the life of the Kingdom of Heaven, the greatest joy and true happiness. And, in persecutions there is always the presence of Jesus who accompanies us, the presence of Jesus who comforts us and the strength of the Holy Spirit that helps us to go forward. Let us not be discouraged when a life that is faithful to the Gospel draws persecution from people. There is the

Holy Spirit who sustains us in this journey.

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Pray with the Pope's Complete Catechesis on the Beatitudes:

- ▶ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (15 April 2020)
- ▶ "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God." (1 April 2020)
- ▶ "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." (18 March 2020)
- ▶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for religiousness, for they shall be satisfied." (11 March 2020)
- ▶ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (19 February 2020)

► "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (12 February 2020)

► "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (5 February 2020)

► Introduction: The Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel (29 January 2020)

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