

Pope St Leo the Great (Leo I), Father and Doctor of the Church, was born in the later part of the 300's and became pope in 440 A.D. Leo faced many difficulties while serving as pope, one of which was combatting heresies. There was also much turmoil in Europe during this time, due especially to marauding gangs that were attacking many parts of the Roman Empire. Attila the Hun was one of them. Attila and his gang were on the outskirts of Rome preparing to invade that city. The Roman emperor had gone into hiding out of fear. It was Pope Leo who went out and met Attila and convinced him not to lay siege to Rome. Pope St Leo I is perhaps most of all known as a great teacher of the faith. This article will present a teaching (homily) he gave on the Beatitudes, with a little of my own commentary mixed in, enclosed in brackets []. And now, Leo's homily...

The nature then of Christ's teaching is attested by His own holy statements: that they who wish to arrive at eternal blessedness may understand the steps of ascent to that high happiness [He's saying, for one thing, what the word 'Blessed' means, namely the highest of happiness; in the Beatitudes, the Almighty God is telling us how to, the only way to, satisfy that terrible thirst for happiness].

Blessed, He says, are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It would perhaps be doubtful what poor He was speaking of, if in saying blessed are the poor He had added nothing which would explain the sort of poor: and then that poverty by itself [i.e., material poverty] would appear sufficient to win the kingdom of heaven which many suffer from hard and heavy necessity. But when He says blessed are the poor in spirit, He shows that the kingdom of heaven must be assigned to those who are recommended by the humility of their spirits rather than by the smallness of their means. Yet it cannot be doubted that this possession of humility is more easily acquired by the poor than the rich: for submissiveness is the companion of those that want, while loftiness of mind dwells with riches. Notwithstanding, even in many of the rich is found that spirit which uses its abundance not for the increasing of its pride but on works of kindness, and counts that for the greatest gain which it expends in the relief of others' hardships. It is given to every kind and rank of men to share in this virtue, because men may be equal in will, though unequal in fortune: and it does not matter how different they are in earthly means, who are found equal in spiritual possessions. Blessed, therefore, is poverty which is not possessed with a love of temporal things, and does not seek to be increased with the riches of the world, but is eager to amass heavenly possessions. [Leo goes on to illustrate humility using the example of the Apostles, as well as material poverty. He recalls Peter who said to the lame beggar: I have neither gold nor silver but what I do have I give freely: in the name of Jesus Christ, stand and walk; and then 5,000 were converted. This is the treasure that humility (poverty of spirit) brings forth]. Leo continues...

Blessed are they which mourn, for they shall be comforted. [He now explains what this mourning is and what it's not]. This mourning, beloved, to which eternal comforting is promised, is not the same as the affliction of this world: nor do those laments which are poured out in the sorrowings of the whole human race make any one blessed. [He's saying that a lot of people mourn over worldly desires that are not fulfilled, worldly things they have and lose or worldly things they want and never got; but his mourning does *not* lead to Blessedness. So what is the mourning that our Lord speaks of? Leo continues...]. The reason for *holy* groanings, the cause of *blessed* tears, is very different. Religious grief mourns sin either that of others' or one's own: nor does it mourn for that which is wrought by God's justice, but it laments over that which is committed by man's iniquity, where he that does wrong is more to be deplored than he who suffers it, because the unjust man's wrongdoing plunges him into punishment, but the just man's endurance leads him on to glory. [Note that it is love of God, of our Lord, that brings about this holy mourning; the person mourns at seeing the offense given to their beloved, like they would for a family member. They mourn, also, because of the person perhaps losing their soul].

Next the Lord says: **blessed are the meek**, for they shall possess the earth by inheritance. To the meek and gentle, to the humble and modest, and to *those who are prepared to endure all injuries*, the earth is promised for their possession. [Leo next takes up the question of: what does "inherit the earth" mean? After all, are we not for Heaven?] And this is not to be reckoned a small or cheap inheritance, as if it were distinct from our heavenly dwelling, since it is no other than these who are understood to enter the kingdom of heaven. The earth, then, which is promised to the meek, and is to be given to the gentle in possession, is the flesh of the saints, which in

reward for their humility will be changed in a happy resurrection, and clothed with the glory of immortality, in nothing now to act contrary to the spirit, and to be in complete unity and agreement with the will of the soul [Leo answers by stating our Lord's promise of a glorified body for those who follow Him, as well as the promise of a "new earth and a new heaven.]. For then the outer man will be the peaceful and unblemished possession of the inner man: then the mind, engrossed in beholding God, will be hampered by no obstacles of human weakness nor will it any more have to be said The body which is corrupted, weighs upon the soul, and its earthly house presses down the sense which thinks many things Wisdom 9:15: for the earth will not struggle against its tenant, and will not venture on any insubordination against the rule of its governor. For the meek shall possess it in perpetual peace, and nothing shall be taken from their rights, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality 1 Corinthians 15:53: that their danger may turn into reward, and what was a burden become an honor. [For our own times, note especially 2 things that Pope Leo mentions here. One is that meekness entails modesty; this would include modesty in dress; meekness does not seek to self-glorify. The second thing is how Leo defines meekness – notice especially that which is italicized above. One thing meekness means is that the person "bears wrongs patiently" (one of the works of mercy); meekness means that the person does not fly into a rage at the slightest injustice].

Blessed are the merciful, for God shall have mercy on them. Recognize, Christian, the worth of your wisdom, and understand to what rewards you are called, and by what methods of discipline you must attain thereto. Mercy wishes you to be merciful, righteousness to be righteous, that the Creator may be seen in His creature, and the image of God may be reflected in the mirror of the human heart expressed by the lines of imitation. The faith of those who do good is free from anxiety: you shall have all your desires, and shall obtain without end what you love. And since through your almsgiving all things are pure to you, to that blessedness also you shall attain which is promised in consequence where the Lord says...

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Great is the happiness, beloved, of him for whom so great a reward is prepared. What, then, is it to have the heart pure, but to strive after those virtues which are mentioned above? And how great the blessedness of seeing God, what mind can conceive, what tongue declare? And yet this shall ensue when man's nature is transformed, so that no longer in a mirror, nor in a riddle, but face to face, it sees the very Godhead as He is, which no man could see ; and through the unspeakable joy of eternal contemplation obtains that which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man. Rightly is this blessedness promised to purity of heart. For the brightness of the true light will not be able to be seen by the unclean sight: and that which will be happiness to minds that are bright and clean, will be a punishment to those that are stained. Therefore, let the mists of earth's vanities be shunned, and your inward eyes purged from all the filth of wickedness, that the sight may be free to feed on this great manifestation of God. For to the attainment of this we understand what follows to lead.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. This blessedness, beloved, belongs not to any and every kind of agreement and harmony, but to that of which the Apostle speaks: have peace towards God; and of which the Prophet David speaks: Much peace have they that love Your law, and they have no cause of offenses [i.e., do not buck and scream against our Lord's teachings, nor have any part of those who do]. This peace even the closest ties of friendship and the most exact likeness of mind do not really gain, if they do not agree with God's will. Similarity of bad desires, leagues in crimes, associations of vice, cannot merit this peace. The love of the world does not consort with the love of God, nor does he enter the alliance of the sons of God who will not separate himself from the children of this generation. Whereas they who are in mind always with God, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, never dissent from the eternal law, uttering that prayer of faith, Your will be done as in heaven so on earth. These are the peacemakers, these are thoroughly of one mind, and fully harmonious, and are to be called sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ, because this shall be the record of the love of God and the love of our neighbor, that we shall suffer no calamities, be in fear of no offense, but all the strife of trial ended, rest in God's most perfect peace.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn