

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Mt 5:5)**

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Christ's statement is startling, almost paradoxical. Blessed are those who mourn. Surely blessedness, happiness, is the very opposite of mourning, or sadness. This beatitude does not say that those who mourn now will be blessed later; that the promise of happiness is what awaits those who are sad. The contrast is much stronger, and much more baffling: happiness can be found in our mourning and our sadness now.

Our journey of Christian discipleship is directed towards our final beatitude, the beatific vision: when, freed from all transient desires, we finally see God. As St John says, "we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2). Our complete happiness lies in God alone.

But this context only serves to render Christ's statement even more baffling: that in our mourning, our loss, our sadness, we are somehow participating in the final and complete blessedness and happiness of eternal life. Eternal life suddenly sounds quite miserable if it's in the experience of our saddest moments here on earth that we get closest to it.

That's clearly not the whole story. But it does contain some element of truth, and something deeply challenging. Letting go of what we hold dear, emptying ourselves of every attachment, so that slowly God takes His proper and rightful place as the centre point of our every desire - this is difficult, and it is at times a process of loss and grief and sadness.

Christ prepares us in the Gospels for such a reality: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). St Paul rejoices in his own sufferings. In his second letter to the Corinthians St Paul sees the good brought out of their sadness: "for the sadness used by God brings a change of heart that leads to salvation" (2 Cor 7:10).

This is in no way a rejoicing at suffering for its own sake: suffering in itself is not good. But it is claiming that suffering remains a central component of the Christian life, and is used by God for our own good. Why? Surely God desires that we are happy and fulfilled, bursting with the joy of the Gospel and brought to life amidst the goodness of creation. How do we make sense of a beatitude that tells us our happiness here and now is found in sadness and loss?

Happiness is never reducible to a single experience. But sadness and loss do play a central role, because they played a central role in the life of Jesus. Christ tells us that to be followers of him we must take up our cross because that is what He did. Sorrow over what is lost, mourning at the entry of sin into the world, is what brought God Himself to undergo death on the cross. And so part of the reason sadness is a source of blessedness is because it can be our involvement in God's great act of redemption. It can unite us to the cross.

And this beatitude becomes clear when we don't neglect the second half. Blessedness is not found in mourning per se, there is nothing to be gained from suffering for its own sake. Rather blessedness is found in those who mourn and are comforted.

The reality of sadness and grief and suffering is that it awakens a need for consolation. When we are able to unite our sufferings to the cross, we open our heart to receive the comfort that God alone can give. The body and soul may still hurt while the character of the suffering remains. But when united to the cross and open to solace in God, its perspective is entirely altered. And here is found the true happiness, that which is enduring and a genuine foretaste of the eternal beatitude that awaits: the conviction that however empty, however pained we may feel, the love of God alone is our true consolation.