



BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.

It has always struck me as slightly strange that this promise of divine adoption is offered to the peacemakers. Not in the sense that it should not be offered to them, but rather that, surely, it should be offered as the reward of all the beatitudes. After all, all of the beatitudes school us in the life of grace, and the life of grace is expressed in our divine adoption.

The question of whether the rewards of the beatitudes are suitably assigned, and whether they refer to this life or the next, vexed the Fathers. Some held, with St Ambrose, that all the rewards of the beatitudes refer to the life to come; while Augustine says that they all refer to this present life. Chrysostom takes a middle way - some are for the future, some are for this life. Aquinas tries to settle the question by, as usual, making a distinction. Some happiness is preparing us for future beatitude in heaven, but some happiness, imperfect but still real, can be attained in this life. 'For it is one thing,' he says, 'to hope that the tree will bear fruit, when the leaves begin to appear, and another, when we see the first signs of the fruit.'¹ St Thomas assigns the beatitude of the peacemakers to a contemplative happiness, which prepares us for the life to come; by making peace we show ourselves to be true followers of God, Who is the God of unity and peace.²

But how exactly do we achieve this? Part of the way to achieve some sense of the promise offered by this beatitude is to see to whom the offer is made: peacemakers. In the scriptures, this does not have the sense it might have today of blue helmeted UN military personnel, nor even, in the first instance, those who try to make peace within and between homes, families, and communities. To jump to this level is already to get ahead of ourselves.

In the Scriptures, peace is richer and fuller. The meaning of the Hebrew word for peace, shalom, connotes a completeness, a wholeness. In the Psalms, peace is the reward of justice, and the crown of the rewards of the just man. Peace has its source in God - it is

¹ *ST I-II, 69, 2, resp.*

² *ST I-II, 69, 4, resp.*

even a divine name as we hear in Judges when Gideon builds an altar to the Lord, and calls the place ‘the Lord is peace.’³

This revelation of Peace as a name for God finds its fullest expression in the name given to the coming Messiah by the prophet Isaiah: the Prince of Peace;⁴ and this promise of peace is manifested by the angels that first Christmas night: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!’⁵ But the true revelation of divine peace is found, ironically, in the cross, where Christ, the Prince of Peace, shows us that the peace He offers, is profoundly different to that of the world. For St Paul, this peace of the cross is, at its heart, a reconciliation of all things in Christ, ‘whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.’⁶ It is in this reconciliation that we find the ultimate expression of the wholeness and completeness that peace means.

But if this peace is something brought about by a divine action, how can we be peacemakers? The peace of the cross flows into our lives through the sacraments. We can see that quite clearly if we think of the words we hear at the end of sacramental confession, ‘The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.’⁷ True peace, which flows from the cross, brings peace to our souls through the sacraments. To understand this, it is worth remembering that the sacraments are the actions of Christ Himself,⁸ and their power is rooted in His Passion.⁹ So when we go to confession and hear the priest say, go in peace, these are the words of our Divine Healer in the Gospels.¹⁰ The sacraments bring about that wholeness and completeness which is rooted in the reconciliation of the cross. To live an integrated life, to live a peaceful life, we must live a sacramental life. To build peace, to be a peacemaker, means first of all bringing peace to

³ Judges, 6:23-24.

⁴ Isaiah, 9:6-7.

⁵ Luke, 2:14.

⁶ Colossians, 1:20.

⁷ *Rite for the Reconciliation of Individual Penitents*

⁸ *ST III*, 64, 3, *resp.*

⁹ *ST III*, 62, 5, *resp.*

¹⁰ Luke, 7:50; 8:48.

our souls. Only then can this become a peace which we share with others, and bring to perfection within our own society.

To be a peacemaker is, by its very definition to be already a son or daughter of God, because true peace requires that graced communion with God which the sacraments give us. In that sense, this sacramental life are the leaves of a tree which promise good fruit in the future. The fruit of this beatitude promise will only be made manifest when all things are reconciled in Christ at the end of time. Until then, we must live in communion with God who gives light to our darkness, and Who, through the sacraments, guides us into the way of peace.¹¹

¹¹ Luke, 1:79.