

KINGDOM OF HAPPINESS

Praise for Kingdom of Happiness . . .

This is a guidebook for real happiness that is much-needed in our modern world of division and loneliness. Filled with personal stories about people Fr. Jeffrey Kirby has encountered, it contains concrete steps to building a virtuous life of deep fulfillment and real joy. Fr. Jeffrey Kirby's book will empower the people blessed to read it.

—Representative Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives

In *Kingdom of Happiness* Father Jeffrey Kirby focuses on Jesus' own description of "Happiness" . . . He unravels these eight descriptions of happiness by Jesus in a creative, captivating, and inspiring way that will help the reader understand this core message of Jesus' teaching and apply it to his or her own life. This is a great material for anyone's meditation.

—Most Reverend Robert Baker, S.T.D., D.D.
Bishop of Birmingham

I'm undoubtedly biased, because he writes for Crux, but for my money Fr. Jeffrey Kirby is flat-out one of the best spiritual writers going in the Catholic Church today. He's lucid, he's deeply erudite yet writes with a common touch, he's balanced and just utterly "Catholic." I can't recommend his work enough, and I know my own faith has been enriched by it.

—John Allen
President/CEO of Crux Catholic Media, Inc.

Father Jeff Kirby's latest work "Kingdom of Happiness" brings together for me many personal experiences as a pastor and parish priest. As we read this book I pray that the words of a Nigerian Archbishop, which Father Kirby quotes, takes root in our own lives: "God is in Africa because God goes where he is wanted!" I pray that our reading of, and reflection on this work may help us to say that indeed God is wanted in our lives!

—Most Reverend Kevin Vann, J.C.D., D.D.
Bishop of Orange

Understanding the goal of life, the purpose for which God created life—happiness with God for eternity—is the basis for our duty to protect and defend all human life. Father Kirby's book provides us with a way to understand that happiness by showing how the beatitudes define true happiness, summarize "the Law and the Prophets," and give us a measure by which to judge how close we are to the happiness that God has promised... Together with Bible reading and family prayer, Father Kirby's book would be an effective way for families to integrate into their homes their Christian commitment into the Sacramental, particularly Eucharistic, life they live in their parishes.

—Most Reverend Vincenzo Paglia, D.D.
President of the Pontifical Academy of Life

Father Kirby has reflected well on the spiritual value of the Beatitudes. In a way, these statements of Jesus are a "roadmap" for the journey of life and taking them seriously will help those on the journey.

—Most Reverend Robert Guglielmo, D.D.
Bishop of Charleston

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KINGDOM OF HAPPINESS

Living the Beatitudes in Everyday Life

Fr. Jeffrey Kirby, STD



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To Father V. Walsh, OCSO,
Friend and Mentor

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A NOTE TO THE READER

First Step

Thank you for picking up this book! As you open it, you've already taken the hardest step along a path that could lead you to true happiness. Here's some more good news:

- *You're not alone.*

Happiness is desired by every human being. Our whole selves, body and soul, are wired for happiness. No one hopes to be miserable, melancholic, confused, or lost. We all want to be happy, preferably with other people, especially those we love and care about. Everyone wants the happiness you want.

- *There's a way out of misery.*

If you're finding that life lacks meaning or purpose, if it seems that you're always in some form of anguish or anxiety, if happiness appears to have been a childhood fantasy that's a pipedream in an adult world, there is hope. Happiness is possible. It won't be easy. It will require some work, but there is a way that leads to

perpetual happiness no matter what this world throws at you.

- *Happiness is a decision.*

It's true. While not always a comfortable one, happiness is a real, blood and guts, in-the-trenches-of-life decision. It isn't just getting what we want or having everything exactly as we desire it, nor is it just some type of euphoria or emotional high. It's not found in the raw consumption of passing pleasures or the aggressive assertion of self-interests. While these might at times be enjoyable and give some security, they never last and always leave us wanting more.

Surrounded by so many passing enjoyments, happiness stands out as a choice. We have to choose to be happy. In the midst of our struggles and consolations—the ups and downs of life—we can choose the constant and steady path of happiness. It *is* available to us.

- *Someone else does the heavy lifting.*

It might seem too good to be true, but it's not. Someone else is willing to do the heavy lifting of our decision to be happy. Jesus wants to take on the weight of our decision so that he can show us the path to happiness.

Now bear with me and please don't put the book down. Honestly, I'm not sure what that previous statement about Jesus means to you. I know that some well-intentioned but mistaken people have turned the Gospel into a shallow self-help guidebook,

or into some removed, idealistic collection of unhelpful, perhaps condescending, maxims about life, misery, and suffering.

This book will tear down those incomplete or false views of what Jesus Christ wants to do for you and the happiness he wants to share with you. The Lord enters into the trenches of human life as he desires to be with each of us. He offers to help us carry the crosses of our lives so that we can continue to choose to be happy and live a life of uninterrupted happiness.

- *Happiness is a kingdom.*

As we pursue happiness, we'll learn where to find its source. In our decision for happiness, we'll find a way of life and a kingdom born of those who fight to live this way of life. This kingdom is of the spirit, but it can be felt, seen, lived, and shared with others right here and now.

- *The kingdom of happiness can be seen.*

The kingdom that gives true happiness is visible. Yes, we can actually point it out and know its presence. This is possible because it's summarized by principles of discernment and signposts of encouragement called the Beatitudes. These simple markers show us what the kingdom of happiness is, how we can recognize it, and how we know when we are living within it.

Conversion to Happiness

Some years ago, I was the director of a Catholic residence for men. The house consisted of young adult men in graduate studies or in the early part of their professional careers who wanted the Faith to be a part of their lives. It was a great opportunity for them (and me) to grow in prayer, virtue, and selfless service. Many men passed through the house during the years I lived there. To each one, in his own way, I sought to be a spiritual coach and shepherd.

One young man who lived in the house was a convert to Catholicism. In the course of getting to know him, I learned many things about his life, interests, and hopes for the future. In one conversation, I asked him, “What did you convert from?” Without skipping a beat, and with a huge smile on his face, he responded, “Unhappiness, Father. I left a lot of unhappiness and found something greater!” I was surprised. I was expecting the name of some other religious tradition, but this young man went to the heart of the matter. In knowing about the sufferings and heartaches of his life, I knew there had been a lot of previous unhappiness and a lot of reasons that could have led him to choose anger, resentment, and self-pity.

In spite of all these darker possibilities, which so many people choose in our world today, this person chose to convert to happiness. It wasn’t a walk in the park for him. He had to fight to persevere in his decision, but he was willing to do it. He saw the choice between light and dark, life and death, happiness and misery, and he chose—without question—to be happy.

In our lives, we have to make our own choice. Will it be an unending and frustrating search for the pleasures and highs

of life? Or will we break free from the malaise of incomplete joys and passing pleasures?

A Second Step

As you started reading this book, I mentioned that you've already taken the hardest step along a path that could lead you to true happiness. Therefore, I'd like to ask you to take a second step and continue reading this book so that you might encounter the kingdom of happiness described through the Beatitudes. As you begin to see this kingdom sitting on the horizon, remember that citizenship within its walls is available *right now*. You are welcome at all times.

The choice is yours. Will you choose happiness?

— INTRODUCTION —

THE CHOICE BETWEEN TWO KINGDOMS

*Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide
and the way is easy, that leads to destruction,
and those who enter by it are many. For the
gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads
to life, and those who find it are few.*

MATTHEW 7:13–14

Our Decision

Some years ago, a young woman came to see me. This particular woman was always flawlessly dressed—easily turning heads—and seemed to enjoy the attention that came with her beauty. Generally speaking, she appeared content, and so I wasn't sure why she wanted to see a priest.

When the appointment came, she walked into my office, sat down, and within seconds began to sob uncontrollably. In my head, I ran quickly through a list of possible hardships she could've been facing, but I obviously didn't know what was wrong.

When she regained some composure, she looked up at me—her makeup smeared, her nose running—and said, “He proposed!” And then she began to weep again. At this point, I was very confused. Proposed? That sounds like something good, right?

Eventually, the young woman told me the whole story. She had a boyfriend; they had dated for some time, and now he had proposed to her. “He really loves me,” she said. “He wants me to be with him forever.”

It seemed like this should be a cause for joy, yet the woman was terrified. All her life, she had used her beauty to manipulate and trick people, even her own father, who she often charmed and kept under her control. Her beauty was a source of power that always got her what she wanted. People were pawns and love was a distant reality.

Now her boyfriend had proposed, and her power was threatened. In the proposal, a man was saying to her, “I love you. I love you without ulterior motive, without selfishness, without counting the cost. I love you for your sake alone.” It was a true expression of love, a real poverty of spirit with all the vulnerability and uncertainty that comes with it. And it rocked the plastic, artificial world of this vain, self-absorbed woman. She was sincerely confused and felt totally lost.

After she shared her story and I delivered some initial pastoral counseling, I outlined everything she had shared with me and explained that she had a choice: “Will you choose to accept and return this love? Will you choose happiness?”

These questions belong not only to this young woman but to each of us. In our lives, which can become so crowded, conditioned, and confusing, will we choose to break through

all that seeks to entangle us and choose a way of life that will bring us happiness?

This decision is the deal maker or the deal breaker on whether happiness will become a reality in our lives.

Happiness and Freedom

As the option of choosing happiness is presented to us, it's important to understand the nature of freedom. A proper understanding of freedom is at the heart of happiness. Contrary to the lifeless machinery of the Wall Street, Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and Washington, DC, cultures, happiness is not found in money, appearances, material possessions, or power. In summary, happiness does not rely on the state of affairs of this world. We have a power given to us, a power to find grace within our fallen world and transcend it. This power is freedom.

As St. Paul teaches, "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). That's not the end of that scriptural passage, but let's return to it in a moment.

In the arenas of our culture today, freedom is an abused, poorly taught, or incompletely defined concept. For some, freedom is a fantasy. They think, *If I could just have this one thing* (perhaps winning the lottery), *I'd be free to live as I want*. This concept of freedom doesn't mean anything because those in this situation feel stuck or vanquished by some spiritual trouble or material obstacle, and that one thing they want will not assuage these underlying issues. For others, freedom is simply a license to do whatever they want. Such people perceive no limit to the fulfillment of their desires, however destructive or self-centered those desires are.

Contrary to cultural currents and the sentiments of many, these understandings do not truthfully or holistically define freedom. Rather than a fantasy or a license to do whatever we please, true freedom comes when our lives are ordered toward friendship with God. When we choose goodness, freedom flows within our souls like blood through our hearts.

One married man may think he is free because he can meet his mistress on a Friday night and no one can stop him while his neighbor, a faithful husband, is not free because he feels bound by his marriage vows. But the adulterous husband becomes a slave to his decisions as he sneaks around, constantly afraid that he will be caught. Even if he denies it, his soul is weighed down by remorse. Conversely, the faithful husband lives with true freedom because he knows his life is being ordered toward goodness, toward a faithful marriage and God. He has nothing to hide and lives in the bliss of this reality.

Yes, we are free to do what we like, just like that man may choose to cheat on his wife, but our freedom is perfected by choosing the good. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth in goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude” (CCC 1731).

So, at its core, freedom is the power to choose between two things, but our freedom is strengthened when we do what is right, when we choose goodness in the midst of wickedness, truth in a world of error, and real beauty in a culture of ugliness. Freedom helps us to know that sin doesn’t define us, tragedy does not have to overwhelm us, and disappointment

or confusion do not have to embitter us. We are free and we have the power to choose.

At the funeral service of Senator Clementa Pinckney, the pastor who was killed in a mass shooting during a Bible study at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, a close friend of the late senator recounted their friendship. He said the two spoke almost every day and, after the shooting, there were times when he would pick up his phone to talk with his friend before remembering that he was dead and he would feel great sorrow and anguish. But then he would catch himself, smile, and say, “I will not let yesterday’s sorrow steal today’s joy.”

We have a choice. Life can be hard, disillusioning, and tempting. There are the loss of loved ones, financial struggles, health concerns, family or relationship problems, moral difficulties, and an array of other problems. But life can also be joyful, full of meaning and purpose, and a source of encouragement. Who or what determines which path we will follow? Not the ways of this world or merely our emotions; rather, we do. We’re free, and we can choose to be happy by ordering our lives toward friendship with God.

And so let’s give the full quote from St. Paul: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). Paul is telling us that we don’t have to be slaves in the kingdom of men; we have the freedom to find a new kingdom.

Happiness and Suffering

In knowing of our freedom to choose happiness, we have to state the obvious. Happiness is not found solely in pleasure,

ease, or comfort. It's not temporary euphoria or an isolated sense of self-fulfillment. If we bounce along a series of pleasures, skipping from one enjoyable sensation to another and living in make-believe realities, we will find ourselves living under that yoke of slavery St. Paul just warned us about.

It's similar to a drug or sex addict who lives a shallow life in between the momentary highs of his addiction. In such a scenario, life becomes all about us. Such a slavery is not happiness but a type of existential tyranny of euphoria. Such people trick themselves into believing they are happy with each new high, no matter what they feel during the lows.

But it isn't just the addicts who live a counterfeit sense of happiness. Many of us have no inclination to drug or alcohol abuse, and yet we live as if life was a theatrical performance. Everyone is either given or assumed to have an assigned role, script, and stage cues. Nothing is real and everything revolves around unbridled narcissism. Think no further than the nature of social media, where we put up a front of ourselves that is often far from the real thing. This fabricated happiness is no happiness at all.

How can anyone think happiness is possible in either fragile situation when we approach life like the addict or the stage actor? How could we allow our happiness to be tethered to the uncertainty of euphoria or the conditions of a counterfeit world?

Ironically, it is often the other extremes of life that bring about true happiness; not the false highs the world can provide us through so many different means, but rather the suffering we encounter.

In choosing to be happy, we must accept suffering. Some believe that suffering destroys our chance at happiness, but

when it's accepted in the right spirit, suffering purifies and intensifies happiness. We're all willing to suffer for what we love; a priest is willing to accept hardship for his parish, spouses for one another, parents for their children, leaders for those in their charge, and good citizens for the causes of justice and peace.

It may be difficult to hear, but suffering is a prerequisite to happiness in a fallen world. We must be willing to suffer, to truly die to ourselves, our passions, our self-centeredness, our sense of justice, our desire for comfort and ease, and our perception of what the world should be in order to truly find and live in the kingdom of happiness. Properly understood, suffering can be an enduring teacher, a tempered comforter, and a source of perseverance along the way to happiness.

Our human experience provides us with a full panorama of examples that convey this truth. Think about:

- The husband and father who is terminally ill, suffering from his medical treatments and knowing that he will leave his family soon, and yet is joyful because he knows that he has *today* with his family, that heaven is real, and that he has the opportunity to show his children how to live and die with grace.
- The single mother who works two jobs, suffers from standing on her feet throughout the day, barely makes ends meet, has no support, and yet is joyful because she's doing it all for her kids.
- The husband who has to work late each night to support his family but prays hard for the energy and will he needs to not only provide for his family but be there for them as well, and finds happiness knowing

his labors are a necessary part of life but don't have to rob him of family joys.

- The young adult who loses friends and becomes an outcast because he chooses not to partake in certain thrills and frivolities, and yet is happy because of the knowledge that his good choices will bring about true friends in the future.
- The reader of this book. What is your experience? What has overtaken your soul and robbed you of your happiness?

Defining Happiness

Now that we know we have a conscious choice to be happy and have properly explained the true nature of freedom and the role suffering can play in our happiness, let's try to pin down what exactly happiness is.

As we've already seen, the definition of happiness is essential; it provides us with a solid foundation. If a man chiefly values the pursuit of great wealth, then when his fortune is taken away (as it often will be in one way or another), he will fall into a state of despair. But here is the key: the financial trouble itself isn't the source of his despair; it was his false definition of happiness. His foundation was weak from the get-go.

With this noted, then, what is happiness?

Biblically speaking, it's receiving, accepting, and seeking to live in a state of beatitude, a condition of being blessed. Some might not know that this is literally what the word beatitude means—"blessed." Happiness is the satisfaction that comes from this beatitude and the awareness of this blessing

and its providence, power, and purpose in our lives.

While there are numerous examples of a blessing being given in Sacred Scripture, from Shem being blessed by Noah, Abraham blessing Isaac, Israel's blessing of Judah, and so on, all human blessings are an expression of the singular blessing given by God to humanity. This blessing began at the creation of the heavens and the earth, but it spans salvation history and culminates in Jesus Christ, who is *the* Beatitude—*the* Blessing—and therefore *the* Happiness of God.

When we begin to see Jesus as the Happiness of God, I'm hoping new doors will open in our hearts. Since so many people have hijacked or disfigured the person of the Lord Jesus, it's good to approach him in his principal place, which biblically is expressed as "the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55–56). This is a place of privilege, favor, and blessing. The Lord Jesus dwells and basks in his eternal identity as the "delight" of God as we read in the Book of Proverbs (8:30–31). In this light, we should begin to understand why the Lord has come to us, why he has broken through every misery, sin, tragedy, heartache, and suffering in order to be with us.

The Lord came to share the beatitude—the blessing—with us when he came to share himself. Though it may not be the same sort of fabricated happiness the world offers us, he wants us to be happy and partake and relish in his kingdom of happiness.

The Lord's invitation is not a distant or foreign one. Jesus Christ did not fall from the sky or emerge as a superhero. He came as one of us. He was born to a mother, lived in a family, loved others, shared in hard work, laughed among friends, cried and felt sorrow, was rejected by those he cared about, understood poverty, was falsely accused of evil, tortured, and

died. The Lord Jesus lived a fully human life. He experienced such a life in order to show us how to live, how to suffer, and how to rejoice.

The Lord's life was not easy, or comfortable, but he persevered in his happiness because his actions were always ordered toward the good, toward friendship with God. Jesus did not promise the same kind of happiness the world claims to give us, in fact, he told us that we, too, would have to carry our cross (see Mt 16:24), but if we carry this cross with sacrificial joy, as he did, we will share in the richness of his happiness.

But we have to accept his call to pick up our cross. Yes, our call for happiness is not an empty decision floating in the cosmos, or a misplaced overconfidence in ourselves. In choosing to be happy, we must choose Jesus Christ and *his* cross. We must choose his kingdom. If we do make this choice, we will give our permission for God's grace to work within us and bring salvation into our lives.

So will we choose a life of misery, marked by either occasional moments of euphoria or of fabricated realities, or will we choose a life of authentic, in-the-trenches happiness with the risen Christ? These are the options: misery or happiness. What will we choose?

The Way

Jesus tells us that he is "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), and so in him, we can find the map, path, and guideposts for our journey to happiness.

From the Lord's own witness and ministry, several marks of his interior life can be discerned to guide us along the path to happiness. Jesus listed these marks in his Sermon on the

Mount (Mt 5–7); they are traditionally called the Beatitudes. Truly, Jesus Christ—the Beatitude of God—has given us these steps, or counsels, to help us to live out our decision for happiness.

The remainder of this book will be an exploration of these Beatitudes so that we can see how they validate, sustain, and nurture our desire for happiness. We'll show them being lived out in Scripture and in everyday life, as well as examine their fascinating connections to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the virtues of the Christian tradition, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, and the deadly sins (which for our purposes we may call the "anti-beatitudes").

At the close of each chapter, you will see a kind of "spiritual matrix" unfold before your eyes, found in a section called the "School of Discipleship." This matrix, or chart, outlines a web of connections that link the central tenets of the spiritual life. For the purposes of our "School of Discipleship," we will call these "Subjects."

To help you better understand these "Subjects," brief information about each one has been given here. Read it now and refer back to it, if needed, throughout the book.

School of Discipleship "Subjects"

Christian Virtues: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines virtue as "an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions" (CCC 1803). St.

Gregory of Nyssa, in his *De beatitudinibus*, says, “The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.” The *Catechism* names seven Christian, or “heavenly,” virtues, broken up into two categories. The four cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, temperance, and courage, while the three theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity (see CCC 1804–29).

Gifts of the Holy Spirit: The *Catechism* tells us that “the moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. . . . They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them” (CCC 1830–31). In short, these are exactly what they sound like—generous gifts from the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, which he bestows upon us at the will of the Father. They allow us to become better and more virtuous people and overcome the pitfalls of the deadly sins. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (sometimes referred to as “wonder” or “awe”).

Petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: Though we may not always consciously realize it, the Lord’s Prayer is a series of petitions, or requests, that we make to God. This prayer was given to us by Jesus during his Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 6:5–13), which of course was also when he preached about the

Beatitudes. These seven petitions, outlined in depth in the *Catechism* (2803–54), follow the initial greeting we make, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” After this greeting, we ask that God’s name be hallowed (honored), that his kingdom comes, that his will be done, that we be given our daily bread, that we be forgiven our trespasses, that we not be led into temptation, and that we be delivered from evil. Moving forward, we will see how each of the Beatitudes is a “blossoming” of these petitions.

Seven Deadly Sins (“Anti-Beatitudes”): The *Catechism* defines sin as “an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity” (CCC 1849). Though there are many different sorts of sins, the Church and her tradition classifies them in a list of seven “capital” or “deadly” sins. Each transgression we commit can be traced back to pride, avarice (greed), envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth (see CCC 1866). For our purposes, in showing them as a contrast to the Beatitudes, we may refer to them as the “anti-beatitudes.”

Note: As you read through the explanations and study the chart, remember that we are drawing all these things back to the Beatitudes, not necessarily drawing parallels between the “Subjects” themselves. While the Christian tradition does have a history of showing the interconnectedness of these aspects of the spiritual life, our work is focused on their relationship to the Beatitudes. Additionally, all

explanations are kept brief to simply graze the surface of this rich theology. For any reader who wishes to go deeper, see the bibliography for resources that can provide more detail.

— CHAPTER I —

POOR IN SPIRIT

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

MATTHEW 5:3

God Goes Where He Is Wanted!

When I was in the seminary, I had the unique opportunity to spend some time in Imo State, Nigeria. One of the local archbishops, a friend of my diocese, invited and hosted me for the visit. In my time there, I was able to see the vibrant faith of the people reflected in beautiful masses, inspirational singing, the people's love for their shepherds, the building of hospitals and churches by the hands of the faithful, and by an intense and warm sense of welcome. I had never experienced the Christian faith in such a profoundly encouraging way.

During my stay, the archbishop made time for me every evening to discuss what I had seen or learned. As my time in Nigeria came to a close, he asked me, "Jeffrey, why is God in Africa?" I was confused by the question, unsure of what he was looking for. My face must have shown my bewilderment because the archbishop asked me again in a slightly raised

voice, “Jeffrey, why is God in Africa?” I finally responded, “I don’t know, Your Grace.”

The high churchman sat back in his chair with a broad smile and a cheerful smirk. He paused, then quickly sat forward, looked me directly in the eyes, and said, “Jeffrey, God is in Africa because God goes where he is wanted!”

It was a powerful moment for me and the catalyst for a great leap forward in my own discipleship. The archbishop was correct in noting the massive growth of the Catholic Church in Africa. He knew this was happening because of their fidelity to the truths of faith and the moral life flowing from it. They had also enacted wide-ranging social outreach and educational endeavors for the betterment of all peoples (Christian and non-Christian). There was immense happiness in the African community despite very real suffering, poverty, and hardships.

By every popular Western standard, the Christian disciples in Africa have no reason to be happy; in fact, they have every possible reason *not* to want God and even feel betrayed by him. From diseases, government corruption, gangs and abuse, human trafficking, drug trades, mass murders, foreign monopolies of natural resources, unemployment, religious extremism and terrorism, domestic violence, and multiple other evils and social ills, the people of Africa could easily cry “foul” toward God and walk away from any claims to happiness. Many of their Western counterparts, having far fewer sufferings, have already done so and abandoned religious faith.

The decision of these African believers for happiness, however, teaches them that being happy cannot depend on the passing things of this world that are so easily lost. Happiness is not an escape from real life or the construction of a pseudo-heaven

that leaves behind struggles and sufferings. With their happiness based firmly on their faith in God, these Christians do not expect leisure or comfort. They can walk boldly through the sorrows of this world and still find joy. They understand that God never promised to remove our sufferings, but in fact promised to help us carry them and redeem us through them. This understanding, and the faith born from it, is where happiness can be legitimately grounded and become a well-spring of hope and inspiration to us and to those around us.

This reliance on God is best understood by the biblical expression “poor in spirit.” Just as these Christians in Africa give witness to it, we are all called to be poor in spirit and to depend on God as the “pioneer and perfecter” of our faith (Heb 12:2).

Surrendering to Our Need for God

In our lives and in our own choices, we have to approach the kingdom of happiness with a poverty of spirit. As shown in the lives of so many witnesses, being poor in spirit is not always easy. It can be grueling, but it’s the beginning of the path to true, stable, and vibrant happiness.

Poverty of spirit begins with a mutual and parallel acknowledgment of both our need for God as well as his all-powerful blessing and care for us in all things. Being poor in spirit means we choose not to command things of God, our world, loved ones, or of ourselves. We truly surrender and seek to be open to receive all things as a gift from our heavenly Father and to generously give ourselves in service to our neighbors. The decision to be poor in spirit is a choice to live in reverence of God and in detachment to the things of this

world. It's both a selection and an election into the kingdom of heaven, which is the kingdom of happiness.

Admittedly, a choice to live dependent on anyone, even God, is immensely counter-cultural in the West today. We are told, pressured, and convinced to rely only on ourselves, to “stand on our own two feet,” to refuse help, avoid assistance, and fuel a radical sense of our own autonomy. We are programmed to become what realist philosophers describe as “the sovereign self.” This egotism and the pride it fosters wars against our decision to be happy. It's precisely what has to be dethroned in order for us to be truly poor in spirit and begin to recognize and live within the kingdom of happiness.

We see in the life of Jesus Christ an unsurpassed model of poverty in spirit.

St. Paul teaches us, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). In another of his letters, the apostle stresses the Lord Jesus's poverty of spirit by citing a popular Christian hymn of his day: “Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5–8).

This passage is oftentimes called the “kenosis hymn.” The word *kenosis* comes from the Greek *ekenosen*, which means “he emptied himself.” It beautifully depicts the Lord's own poverty of spirit as he relied on God and lovingly poured himself out for humanity.

As with Jesus, so with each of us. In our desire and search for happiness, we are invited to accompany the Lord Jesus in becoming poor in spirit.

Turning Things Right Side Up

St. Paul is among the great shepherds of the Christian tradition, but this wasn't always so. At one point in his life, he was a persecutor of Christians and even oversaw their deaths. But in the midst of his murderous zeal, the Lord Jesus came to him and rocked Paul's world, inviting the once-persecutor of Christians to become a believer in the Gospel (see Acts 9:1–19). Jesus offered a man who was miserable a chance at happiness. And Paul, bruised, broken, and blind, accepted the invitation.

The Acts of the Apostles recounts the far-reaching ministry of the belated apostle to the Gentiles. On one occasion, St. Paul and his companions traveled to Thessalonica (later he would write two letters to the Christians in this city: 1 and 2 Thessalonians). Upon entering the city, Paul went to the local synagogue and began to preach about Jesus Christ and the resurrection. Many Jewish men, God-fearing Greeks, and prominent women were convinced by his apostolic preaching. Others, however, were jealous of the apostle and the conversions brought about by his ministry. They gathered together a group of some bad characters and started a mob in the marketplace.

But St. Paul and his followers had already left the marketplace and gone to the home of Jason, a recent convert. The mob went to the house, and when they couldn't find the Christian teachers, they dragged Jason out of his home and

took him to the local authorities, declaring that the Gospel had turned the world “upside down” and that Jason was giving them hospitality (Acts 17:6–8). Jason had to pay a bond while St. Paul and his group left the city.

It’s interesting that the Thessalonians would argue that the Gospel proclamation, which is the message of happiness, would turn the world “upside down.” We could argue more legitimately that the Good News actually turns the world *right side up*, since left to our own devices we find only self-centeredness and misery in a world marked by confusion and darkness. While momentary happiness might be possible, true and consistent happiness can only be found in a world that is right side up; that is, facing in a direction beyond itself, toward God, who is all-good and the source of long-lasting happiness.

In highlighting the preaching of the early Church, we should remind ourselves that the life of the apostles and their disciples was not an easy one. St. Paul explains:

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly clothed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the dregs of all things. (1 Cor 4:9–13)

And in a different letter he continues more emphatically:

But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Cor 6:4–10)

Clearly the apostles and first generation of Christians endured a hard life. And yet they saw their sufferings as opportunities to put their world right side up, to be poor in spirit and grow deeper in their decision for happiness.

Like the Christians in Africa today, the patristic-era Christians relished in their reliance on God. Will we choose a similar poverty of spirit?

The Widow's Mite

In his public teachings, the Lord praised an unexpected example of someone living poor in spirit. While in the Temple, Jesus looked up and saw many rich people putting their gifts into the treasury. He also observed a poor widow putting in two mites, the smallest of copper coins valued at a halfpenny.

Most people would have overlooked the widow since her social status was not one of prominence and her gift was not a significant one in terms of monetary value.

The Lord Jesus, however, saw something others did not. “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had” (Lk 21:3–4). The two mites the woman gave reflected her sustenance and basic well-being. By giving them, she showed her complete dependency on God. She manifested that her life was a living supplication to God and his goodness.

The widow chose a happiness that is not given by this world, one that the proud and self-reliant can never understand.

In our lives, are we in the crowd with those who gave from their abundance, or are we in the company of this holy widow?

Mount to Mission

With each of the Beatitudes, we have to try to understand how we can live them out in our daily lives. We have to take what Jesus taught us on the mount and make it our mission to live out those teachings.

So what is our “mount to mission” strategy for becoming poor in spirit?

As we’ve seen in the lives of the holy ones, our decision for happiness will bring forth a desire to live with a poverty of spirit. While this is an authentic inclination given to us as children of God, we will feel a battle within our hearts since—although we were created good—we are fallen and crave to possess, own, and control ourselves, things, other people, and

even God. This craving is fed by fear, anxiety, constant restlessness, and an insatiable appetite for more.

The battle, however, is worth the fight, and the conflict will have two major fronts: one of the spirit and the other within the material world. Neither should be overemphasized or neglected. The summons to live poor in spirit is not only a spiritual call to dependency and humility but also a command to temperance and detachment.

In his teachings, Jesus never promised health or wealth. Those who preach such a message are false prophets who adulterate the Gospel and obscure the path to heaven. It is important for us to know what the Lord promised and the life he invites us to live so that we can be happy.

As we seek to follow the real Gospel—the Gospel that shows us the meaning and value of suffering and poverty—God is able to sustain our happiness and bless us with freedom, flexibility, and a forgiving spirit.

In receiving these blessings, we will actively seek a poverty of spirit in all the material and spiritual areas of our lives. This includes how we approach abilities and talents, our health, our aging process and limitations, the future, our prestige, the affection of others, time, accepting correction, giving guidance, and how we own and use the things of this world.

Some general examples of how others have owned or used things in a desire to live a simplicity of life include:

- The person who is going to buy another pair of shoes but then considers their closet's current supply, chooses not to purchase the shoes, and instead buys a pair for someone with a greater need in their community.
- A married couple using Natural Family Planning who

welcomes God's gift of new life and all its challenges, while also, at times, practicing chastity at the expense of their physical desires.

- The older woman who struggles from despair about her declining appearance but ultimately accepts the reality of aging and welcomes the blessings that come with growing older, offering to watch her grandchildren one night so that her daughter and son-in-law can take a date night.
- The young man making millions for a large bank who gives up his life of luxury to start a charity helping impoverished youth.
- The teenager who shops at local thrift stores and will wear any clean and decent clothes and is not worried about name brands and the vanity games of his or her peers.

In living with a poverty of spirit, we are able to exercise virtue, especially temperance in our daily actions and charity to those in need.

Additionally, the desire to pray is enhanced and intensified within our souls as we realize our deep need for God and our dependence on him. Lastly, as we live a life poor in spirit, we have nothing to lose as we seek to advocate for justice and peace. We are empowered to speak the truth in love and to undergo any persecution for the sake of goodness and beauty.

An Examination of Conscience

- Do I acknowledge that my happiness comes from God and his blessings?

- Do I let myself fully understand how greatly I need God and his grace in my life?
- Do I actively participate in Mass and seek ways to revere God and his majesty?
- Am I ungrateful to God and those around me?
- Do I blame situations or other people for my misery?
- Do I accept sufferings as opportunities to mature and deepen in my desire for happiness?
- Do I believe myself to be better than or superior to others?
- Do I engage in flattery or gossip?
- Do I overspend, live beyond my means, cheat others, or live in a needlessly frugal way with myself or others?
- Am I temperate in my use of food, alcohol, medication, and the treatment of my body or the body of another?

School of Discipleship

As we mentioned in the introduction, this section, found at the conclusion of each chapter, will outline a series of fascinating links between the Beatitudes and the Christian virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, and the deadly sins (or anti-beatitudes).

Through the unfolding of this chart and its corresponding explanations, you'll see how all these aspects of the spiritual life point back, in a myriad of ways, to the blessings of the Beatitudes. These connections are no coincidence, but rather a testament to the balance and harmony of Christ's teachings.

This fascinating chart will thus provide you with a roadmap to find the kingdom of happiness.

With this in mind, let's look at the first beatitude: **poor in spirit**.

As we grow in spiritual poverty, the Holy Spirit bestows on us the gift of **fear of the Lord**, sometimes called "awe" or "wonder." A person with wonder and awe knows that God is the perfection of all we desire. This gift guides us in seeing God's glory and his work in our lives. We can see how this goes hand in hand with a poverty of spirit since such a state helps us acknowledge our need for God (acknowledging our need for him leads to an "awe" of him).

Once we receive this gift, the virtue of **temperance** is perfected in our soul, which is properly using the created things of the world according to the purpose for which they have been given. It is knowing how to put "first things first"; namely, putting God first and putting our own wants and desires second. More common terms would be moderation or self-control. If we keep a poverty of spirit and if we fear the Lord, we will refrain from wanting and asking for too much, because we will know we should only want whatever God sends us, and no more.

This beatitude, gift, and virtue help us to better understand the petition in the Lord's Prayer "**hallowed be thy name**" since in this utterance we acknowledge God's majesty and our lowliness before him. The blossoming of this petition leads us to the promise of this beatitude, which is to inherit the kingdom of heaven. If we honor God and his name, we will become his adopted sons and daughters and have a share in his inheritance.

Lastly, the path that begins from this beatitude and crosses

through these other aspects of the spiritual life helps us overcome the capital sin of **pride**. It should be clear how an inflated sense of self keeps us from being poor in spirit, as well as from fearing the Lord and keeping his name “hallowed.” Pride is a rebellion against God in order to serve ourselves, and in doing so, we lack temperance because we have made the decision to put ourselves first. With pride, we fail to have dependency and trust and seek to take in as much glory as we can for ourselves. The dark spirit of pride creates a small world that revolves only around us, our talents, our perceived power, and the use of things and other people as a means for our own use and enjoyment. This is the sin of the fallen angels, of our first parents, and of every soul doomed to perdition. And for many, it can be a hell on earth.

As the promise of the poor in spirit is the kingdom of heaven, so the punishment of the anti-beatitude is this small, suffocating world full of loneliness and emptiness.

In conclusion, the first row of our spiritual matrix looks like this:

BEATITUDE	GIFT OF THE SPIRIT	CORRESPONDING VIRTUE	PETITION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER	CAPITAL SIN/ ANTI-BEATITUDE
<i>Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven</i>	Fear of the Lord	Temperance	Hallowed be thy name	Pride

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

I want to be happy. Keep me from misery and the lies of this world.

As so many things promise happiness, I turn and surrender to you.

I am poor in spirit and desperately need you.

Come to me as I wait, empty and open to your grace.

Nothing can fill me with happiness except you and your blessings.

Bring me into your kingdom! Bless me with happiness!

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Three Helpful Truths to Live a Poverty of Spirit:

- + We did not create ourselves.
- + All that we have has been given to us.
- + All that we possess will be taken from us, whether we like it or not.

Promise of the Lord Jesus

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:28–29

Prayer of Job

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

Job 1:21