

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes August 9, 2006

Matthew 6:1-4

[5:48: You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.]

1: "Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

2: "Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

3: But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

4: so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Discussion Notes:

Intro: Conversion involves a change both inside and out.

- a. The Sermon on the Mount
 - Jesus calling & training disciples = call to holiness & union with Him.
 - i.e., Establishing, outlining, and establishing his program of discipleship.
- b. Beatitudes: the core of his teachings; ladder of renewal / foundation stones
 - Jesus is emphasizing the importance of internal conversion,
 - But this does NOT exclude the externals!
- c. Catechism on the importance of Internal conversion:

IV. INTERIOR PENANCE

***1430** Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.²³*

***1431** Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart).²⁴*

***1432** The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart.²⁵ Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: "Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!"²⁶ God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.²⁷*

V. THE MANY FORMS OF PENANCE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

***1434** The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving,³¹ which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: effort at*

reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity "which covers a multitude of sins."³²

1435 Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right,³³ by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance.³⁴

d. The important summarizing statement: 5:48

5:48: *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

- But what did Jesus mean by perfection?
- Examine St. Paul's description in Philippians 3:7-17
 - 7: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*
 - 8: *Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ*
 - 9: *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith;*
 - 10: *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*
 - 11: *that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*
 - 12: *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*
 - 13: *Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,*
 - 14: *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
 - 15: *Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you.*
 - 16: *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*
 - 17: *Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us.*
- Jesus is therefore talking about an attitude of life: heart, mind, soul, & strength.

e. In 6:1 Jesus cautions his followers to beware of a tendency for misplaced motives;

- The external expressions of our faith carry the danger of ostentation,
- And this danger, which shows on the outside, begins on the inside;
- **"Beware of practicing your piety before men"**
 1. not merely our pious actions but our acts of righteousness that we owe God;
 2. Not warning against doing these BEFORE MEN, as if they are to be only done in private:
 - Remember earlier, 5:13-16 they ARE salt / light:
 - Note 5:16: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*
 - "Your light" = "practicing your piety"
 - Property reason for acts: so others might see them & give glory to God; points to God.
- Therefore the problem: **"in order to be seen by them"**
 - Indicates a complete misunderstanding / misdirection of heart.
- **"for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."**
 - **Rewards:** mystery; Not obligating God or earning salvation;
 - Rather: trusting in God;
 - The Church / Spiritual writers have expressed that somehow the level of our eternal experience of the Beatific Vision depends upon how we have lived by grace.
 - 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

11: For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12: Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw --

13: each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

14: If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

15: If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

f. In 6:3-18 Three illustrations of this caution in three acts of piety his audience already knows:

- All with same pattern:
 1. The practice
 2. The abuse
 3. Condemnation of the abuse
 4. Advice
- All three begin with the phrase, "When you" ... implies this are acts they know & do:
 - Tobit 12:8-9 *"Prayer is good with fasting and alms more than to lay up treasures of gold. For alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting."*

g. 6:2-4 Almsgiving

A: The Practice: "Thus, when you give alms,

- "Alms" does not in the first place have anything to do with money;
- More literally "mercy-mindness", so referring acts of mercy:

2447 The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities.²⁴² Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead.²⁴³ Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.²⁴⁴

He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none and he who has food must do likewise.²⁴⁵ But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you.²⁴⁶ If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?²⁴⁷

B: The abuse: "sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men."

- Did they really do this or hyperbole? (ceremony)

C: The Condemnation: "Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."

- Solemn statement
- Their external trumpeting reveals an internal trumpeting!
- Their acts have lost any spiritual significance / benefits

D: The Advice: "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

- Assumes they will continue doing acts of mercy;
- "left hand ... right hand": hyperbole; addressing our internal motives; in other words, we are to give freely without even considering, worrying about, calculating our rewards.
- "so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."
 - God knows our actions, our hearts, motives, so leave it to Him; trust.
 - Proverbs 3:5-6