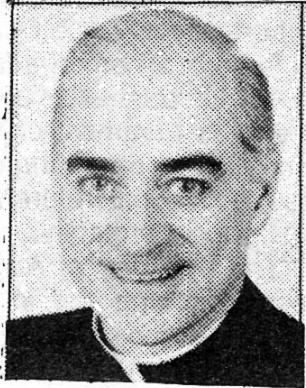


Father John Catoir

Poor in Spirit

The most important words ever spoken were the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon the central idea is expressed in the "Beattitudes," particularly in the first one, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* It is vitally important that we try to grasp the meaning of this teaching, which implies a radical honesty about our dependence on God. Living the Gospel without compromise is impossible without God's grace.



St. Thérèse, the Little Flower, is a good example of a person who lived this poverty of spirit which seems to elude so many of us. She once wrote that she was sad at having uncharitable feelings toward the sister who kneeled next to her in chapel. We don't know what the problem was, but try as she might St. Thérèse was unable to improve.

She realized that Jesus commanded us to *love one another as I have loved you*, but her best efforts were not enough to overcome her problem. So she turned to prayer, "Lord, I am unable to correct my faults, I am unworthy of You. But even if I can't love her as You love her, You

Lord, living in me can love her for me, and through me."

She turned her weakness over to the power of God, and it seemed to solve everything. After she died, the "problem sister" was quoted as having said, "I will miss her terribly; she always had a special affection for me, and I for her."

This is a good lesson because it shows us how God in mysterious ways comes to the aid of those who are poor in spirit. The arrogant he leaves to their own devices.

I mention this story because there are many people who rebel against teachings of the church. They do not want to be constrained by moral teachings, so they demand that the church change its teachings instead of humbly asking for help. In light of the central importance of the "Beattitudes" it seems far wiser to approach every problem with humility.

The poor in spirit may feel the burden of their weakness, but they plead for God's help. St. Augustine once said, "Do what you can do, and pray for what you cannot yet do." He might have added, "But don't be arrogant about it, the stakes are too high."

Jesus did not mince words when he said, *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* (Matthew 18:3)