

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
JULY 3, 2022**

**THE BEATITUDES, PART 2---“Blessed Are Those Who Mourn”
Matthew 5:4**

Once upon a time there were a pig and a sheep who were very good friends. One day they were walking down a little country road, deep in conversation with each other. They weren't looking where they were going and they both fell into a large mud hole. The sheep totally panicked---yelling and trying to get out of the mud as quickly as possible. She was a mess---her beautiful white wool was thick with mud. She rolled around in the grass trying to get as clean as she could. But she was still a mess. She complained to the pig, “Wasn't that a horrible accident?” The pig, who was greatly enjoying wallowing in the mud, said, “I thought it was a *wonderful* accident!”. (Father Anthony Coniaris, No Man Ever Spoke As This Man, Light & Life Publishing, p. 50)

Pigs and sheep have very different attitudes about mud! Note that in the Bible, we Christians are always called “sheep”, not “pigs”! The Biblical idea is that if we Christian sheep fall into the mud of sin, we should want to get out and get clean---not wallow in the mud puddle!

Even the whitest sheep sometimes do get muddy. And we Christian sheep do, too. We fall into the mud of sin. But our Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, tells us how to get out of the mud and get clean. As He said in Matthew 5:4, in 2nd Beatitude-----“Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.”

What is it we should mourn for? For our sins. We sheep should mourn that we have gotten spiritually muddy!

This summer I am doing a sermon series on the Beatitudes as told to us by our Lord Jesus Christ in chapter 5 of the gospel of Matthew. We are looking at them one by one, week by week. In the Beatitudes, the Lord tells how to live as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, how to be truly blessed.

Today, we are looking at the 2nd Beatitude---to repeat it again: “Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted.”

The Church Fathers say that in this verse, Christ is speaking about our mourning for our *sins*. Not for illness, not for hard times, not for a bad job, not even for death. But for our *sins*. Because the Fathers teach us that sin is the only truly and completely sad thing. St. John Chrysostom wrote about

1600 years ago----“Only *one* thing is worthy of sadness: sin.”

Sin is the only totally sad thing because it pulls us away from God—and what could be sadder than that? And so we should be sad about our sins, we should mourn about our sins.

And if we do mourn for our sins, then Christ says we are “blessed”. How so? We are then blessed because we are comforted by God. And the greatest comfort of all is to be forgiven of our sins and set free from our sins. What a happy and blessed combination!

I hope you have had the joy of getting free from some particular sin. The joy of noticing---“I used to gossip, but God has delivered me from it. Still some other sins to deal with, but the gossip is gone.” Or---“I used to be a crabby, complaining fellow, but no more, thanks to God. Still some other sins to deal with, but that one is gone.” Such comfort is great----to get clean from some mud!

But to get that comfort, Jesus says we have to mourn first. Our sins are very sad and we will indeed mourn for them at one time or another----it can't be avoided! Either we truly mourn for them here, leading to some day getting rid of them. Or we will mourn for them in hell----and there we will mourn for them forever. But it's an especially sad mourning, for it will never get rid of our sins.

St. Arsenius lived about 1700 years ago. He mourned a lot---for his own sins. He cried and cried and cried---he definitely had the gift of tears. What did he cry about so much? His own sins. At his funeral, another holy man, St. Poemen, walked up to the coffin and spoke to the body of St. Arsenius. He said to him, “Abba Arsenius, you are truly blessed for you mourned for your sins in *this* life. And now you will have only comfort and joy in heaven! But he who does not cry about his sins here will cry for them forever in hell.” (A Night On The Holy Mountain, Metropolitan Hierotheos, Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2000, p. 83)

Yes, we will all cry for our sins someday. Either here (and God will comfort us) or forever after death. Then there will be no comfort but only eternal sadness!

So examine yourself---what are your sins? If you are not sure, you who are married have available a very easy way to find out----just ask your spouse...and you will hear quickly what your sins are!

Once you've identified your sins----mourn for them, weep for them, ask forgiveness for them. And very important-----with God's help, leave the sins

behind, stop the sin. And for that we all need much help----that's why we have the sacrament of Confession... I go to Confession and you should, too.

As you mourn for your sins, God will comfort you just as Jesus Christ promised in the 2nd Beatitude. And as the sin is forgiven, and as you leave the sin behind, your tears of sadness will change into tears of joy!

Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ who, when we mourn for our sins, gives us the great comfort of being forgiven and cleansed!