

Crumbs – Good News for the Diaspora!

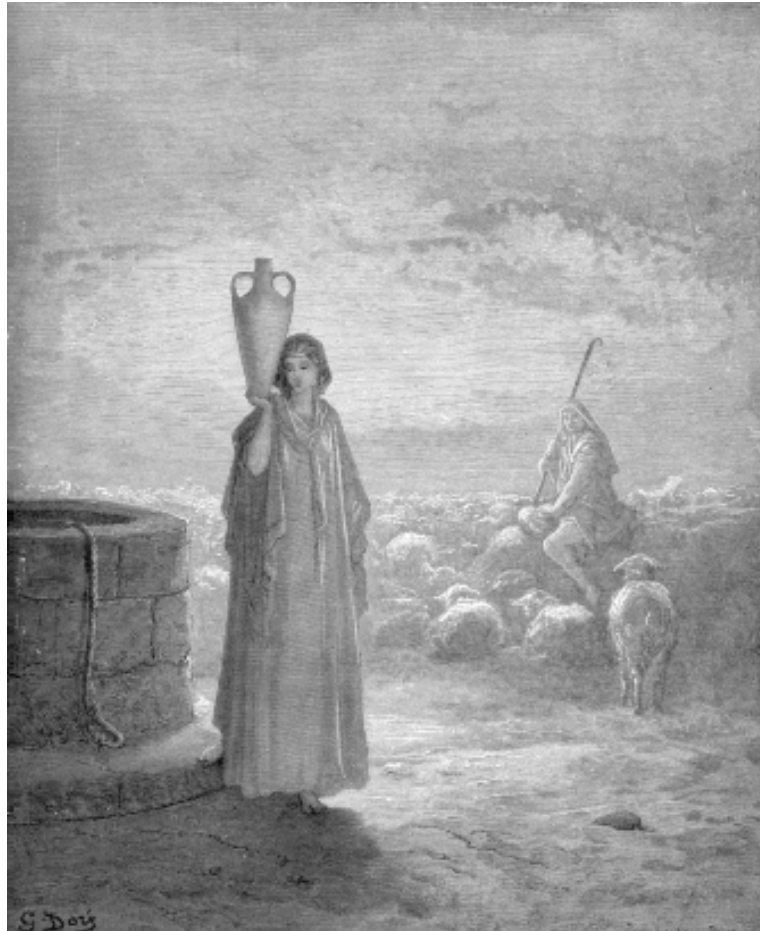


Illustration: Jacob Tending the Flocks of Laban

Third Part:

The Christian's Life and Death.

A Devotional for the

Week of the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.

SUNDAY.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. – Matthew 5:3.

True Christians, who in faith are sure of their Savior and of His salvation, are poor in spirit. They are poor in spirit with regard to all those things that do not concern Christ and His salvation. Spiritually, in their spirit, which is ruled by the Holy Spirit, they are poor with regard to these things. They do not regard these things; they do not set their hearts on them; they consider them quite vain and of no value. Their spirit, their heart, soul, and mind, is filled with the things they have in Christ; therefore their soul is free and unencumbered as respects all other things. When people praise them and call them happy because of any earthly and personal advantages, they smilingly shake their heads and think of the advantages which Christ has given them. Must not the light of the moon and the stars pale before that of the sun?

The Apostle Paul was a man who was thus poor in spirit. He writes: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, Yea, doubtless; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is of the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

(Philippians 3:7-11.)

Thus true Christians are poor, poor in spirit with regard to all that pertains to their persons and to earthly matters. But they are blessed, very rich and happy, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

PRAYER. – O my God, who for Christ's sake hast graciously given me the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven, make me poor in spirit through Your Holy Spirit, that I may not set my heart on anything that is severed from Christ, lest I be again enchanted and ensnared by vain, fleeting, and delusive things, but that with all my heart I desire only that which will make me truly and eternally happy. Amen.

Hymn 83, 1.

One thing's needful! Then, Lord Jesus,
Keep this one thing in my mind;
All beside, though first it please us,
Soon a grievous yoke we find;
Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving,
No true, lasting happiness ever deriving.
The gain of this one thing all loss can requite,
And teach me in all things to find true delight.

MONDAY.

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.
– *Matthew 5:4.*

True Christians, God's children, mourn here on earth. Why so? Their sin causes them to grieve and mourn. They are no longer rude and carnal-minded men that sport with sin. They are born again by the Spirit of God and desire earnestly to serve God with a pure heart and with good works that are pleasing in His sight; and it grieves them that sin still dwells within them and spiritually paralyzes them.

Read the lamentation of St. Paul in Romans 7:14-24, where he finally exclaims: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The sin of others grieves them too, and they mourn because of it. What sad things they must see and

experience! How the world does run into destruction! How many fall from faith? Nor are the Christians exempt from this earth's misery which befalls all mankind. And besides this, the hatred of the devil and of the wicked world is directed against them especially. And, moreover, they must crucify their own flesh, which causes pain, indeed. And in addition to all this, they experience the chastisement of God, which smarts, though it is gracious and wholesome.

Yes, indeed, true Christians and children of God mourn here on earth. But they are blessed. For, being the children of God, they shall be comforted. They shall be comforted always, even here on earth, God Himself comforts them through His Word and Holy Spirit. God speaks words of tender love to their hearts, telling them that He loves them; that all their sins have been fully forgiven for Christ's sake; that He desires them to remain His dear children, though world, sin, and hell combine against them; that He will cause all, yes, all things to work together for good to them. Then the light of heavenly comfort burns bright within them. And in the blessed life to come this light of comfort will utterly and completely dispel all the darkness of sorrow. "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

PRAYER. – Come, Lord Jesus, and do to me according to Your Word! Let me bear the sorrow of the children of God, but also give to me the comfort which You have promised them that are Yours. And after this life let me graciously enjoy the fullness of comfort in the mansions of eternal bliss. Amen.

Hymn 333, 2.

Let us suffer here with Jesus,
To His image e'er conform;
Heaven's glory soon will please us,
Sunshine follow on the storm,
Having sown in tears, in gladness

We shall reap. With patient cheer,
Let us hope and, void of fear,
Bide the turning of our sadness.
Christ, I suffer here with Thee,
There, oh, share Thy joy with me!

TUESDAY.

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

– *Matthew 5:5.*

True Christians, God's children, are meek. They are not selfish, willful, quarrelsome, contentious, disputatious, vindictive, angry, spiteful. And when they are tempted by their flesh in this direction they are soon brought back to a state of meekness through the Holy Spirit that abides in them. The love of Christ rules within them; it makes them long-suffering and kind; – it does not suffer them to grow envious, to vaunt themselves, to be puffed up, to deport themselves unseemly, to seek their own, to be easily provoked, nor to think evil; it makes them bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things.

True Christians, God's children, gladly yield in all things pertaining to their own person. Only when the Word of God and their faith is attacked, they stand firm and unyielding. They rather suffer wrong than do wrong. They are ever ready to forgive. It is easy to get along with them. They are blessed people. For, says the Savior, they shall inherit the earth. They shall dwell on earth in that peace which is denied them that are not meek. For the Lord, their Lord, espouses their cause, and protects them, and sees to it that justice is done them. The Lord makes even their enemies to be at peace with them. They have the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. They shall inherit the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.

"Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth."

PRAYER. – O meek Jesus, my Lord and Savior, who did not strive nor cry, nor did cause an angry voice to be heard in the streets, who did suffer patiently, and did make intercession for Your enemies, and did commit all to Him that judges righteously: make me, Your disciple, to be like You! Espouse my cause on this sad earth, until You shall bring me where I shall inherit the new earth. Amen.

Hymn 334, 2, 3.

I am the Light, I light the way,
A virtuous life displaying;
Who comes to me and follows, aye,
I lead from his dark straying.
I am the Way, and well I show
How men should sojourn here below.

My heart in lowliness abounds,
My soul with love is glowing,
And from my mouth are words and sounds
Of meekness overflowing.
My heart, my mind, my strength, my all
To God I yield, on Him I call.

WEDNESDAY.

Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. – *Matthew 5:6.*

All poor sinners who truly believe in Jesus Christ have and possess with Him that righteousness wherein they can stand before God and be saved. For the righteousness of Christ is imputed to true faith, be it strong or weak. And this is valid before God and will

avail before His judgment-seat, for it is a spotless and perfect righteousness. After this righteousness of faith Christians need not hunger and thirst; they have it, and they praise the unfathomable grace of God who has graciously procured this righteousness for them, and through faith gives and appropriates it to them.

But now they hunger and thirst after another righteousness. They hunger and thirst after a righteousness which they are to practice in their every-day life. Just because they have learned to know and have experienced the wonderful grace of God, thanks to which all their sins are forgiven and in no wise imputed to them, they continually hunger and thirst to do only that which is right before God and over against their neighbor, and what God would have them do. And it grieves them that they succeed so poorly. For their old Adam clings to them until they die. And so this hunger and thirst is with them until they depart this life.

Indeed, the better Christians we become, the more this hunger and thirst increases, as well as the grief that goes with it. But for this very reason, just because we hunger and thirst in this manner, we are blessed people. For by the grace of God we shall then ever more succeed to do right. And when this brief time is past, when we fall asleep and awaken again, then we shall be perfectly righteous. Our hunger and thirst shall be satisfied.

PRAYER. – Give to me, therefore, O merciful God, give to me, whom You have graciously received as Your child, that hunger and thirst after righteousness which I should practice in my whole life, in everything that I may think or desire, speak or do. Increase this hunger and thirst within me! And satisfy it, O God! Satisfy it ever more and more by helping me to do what is right. Satisfy it fully when I shall awaken with Your image. Amen.

Hymn 351, 2.

MAY Thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart,

My zeal inspire;
As Thou hast died for me,
O may my love to Thee
Pure, warm and changeless be,
A living fire.

THURSDAY.

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

– *Matthew 5:7.*

True Christians, God's children, are known to be merciful. For their faith daily teaches and reminds them that it is only and exclusively by the mercy of God that they are what they are. And this light of divine mercy is reflected in their regenerated hearts. They also hear their Savior say: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:36.)

And the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and of Christ, makes them merciful. And the seed of mercy germinates and sprouts and buds and blossoms and bears fruit within their hearts, which by nature indeed are sinful and, hence, unmerciful. For the new birth is mightier than the carnal birth.

True Christians, God's children, are merciful toward friend and foe, toward fellow-believers and toward such as adhere to false doctrines, toward rich and poor, indeed, toward everybody. Mercy is the element in which they live, as a fish lives in water and a bird in the air. They are blessed. For they, too, obtain mercy, even in this present time, from God, their Father, and from their brethren and sisters in the faith. And one day, on the day of Christ's reappearing, theirs shall be a bliss inexpressible, when by God's mercy they shall bask in His never-ending mercies.

PRAYER. – Merciful God, in whose mercy I live and have my being, whose mercy shall one day greet and satisfy and enrapture me: make me – a poor sinner, I implore You – ever more like You. My Father, I desire to bear Your image, for I love You. And I would have all men know that I am Your child. Make me merciful, even as You are merciful! Amen.

Hymn 362, 1. 3.

O GOD of mercy, God of might,
In love and pity infinite,
Teach us, as ever in Thy sight,
To live our life to Thee.

Teach us the lesson Thou hast taught,
To feel for those Thy blood hath bought;
That every word, and deed, and thought
May work a work for Thee.

FRIDAY.

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

– *Matthew 5:8.*

The Prophet Isaiah says: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6.) God Himself says: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Genesis 8:21.)

Does this also refer to true Christians, to God's children? Most assuredly. The heart of true Christians is still smirched with sin. And just they, more than all other men, know this and sincerely deplore this sad fact. But their sin is forgiven them. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7.) And "now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be;

but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." (1 John 3:2-3.)

There we have it. True Christians, the children of God, strive against all sin and uncleanness that dwells within them, and through the Holy Spirit that dwells within them they rule over sin. They are always mindful of the pure and holy God, who in Christ is their dear Father, and seek to be like Him. Are you not familiar with this? And thus they – we – are blessed people.

God shall crown our seeking with joy: one day we shall see God; then the glorious image of God shall be resplendent within our souls and be reflected therein in heavenly and perfect purity. Yes, "blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

PRAYER. – My God and Father, who through Jesus Christ has adopted me as Your dear child, and has given me Your Holy Spirit, that I may greatly rejoice in Him: give, O give to me an abundant measure of Your grace, that I may rule over all the unclean desires of my depraved heart and purify myself. And finally let me see Your face in the everlasting light, and illumine me throughout unto perfect purity. Amen.

Hymn 343, 5.

A clean heart create in me,
Which in Thee, O God, believeth,
And at the iniquity
Of my sins sincerely grieveth;
And when hours of woe betide me,
In the wounds of Jesus hide me.

SATURDAY.

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God – Matthew 5:9.

The most frightful and insane war imaginable is that which, in consequence of sin, the creature has declared against God, its Creator. Death immediately followed upon the first transgression.

But God, out of great mercy, made peace through Christ Jesus. And God proclaims this peace through His Word and His Holy Spirit. And they who accept this gracious peace are the children of peace and of God. To them the Holy Ghost says: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18.) And the children of God are always ready to listen to this. Being of the same mind, it easily impresses itself upon their minds. They endeavor to always live at peace with all men.

There are always two parties to a quarrel. If any one wants to start to quarrel with them, they simply will not do so. They furthermore endeavor to make peace when they see others quarrel. They do not, however, desire to have and maintain a hollow peace, which would compel them to forsake the Word of God, the saving Truth, and to renounce obedience to God. No, that is impossible for them to do.

But where only human beings and human rights are concerned, they are ready to make peace, there they draw round about them a circle of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God." Thus says the Savior. For by their peaceableness they prove that they are the children of God, the God of peace. And on the day of judgment it will become evident before all men that the peaceable disposition which they showed here on earth proves them to have been the children of God.

PRAYER. – Gracious God, who has given that peace, which comprises all blessedness, to me, a sinner and rebellious creature, grant that this knowledge may make me peaceable such as You would have me be. Give to me Your Holy Spirit, that I may always bear in mind that I am Your child through Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

Hymn 346, 5.
And let me with all men,
As far as in me lieth,
In peace and friendship live;
And if Thy gift supplieth
Me wealth and honor fair,
Then this refuse me not,
That naught be mingled there
Of goods unjustly got.

These devotions are adapted from *Crumbs* by C. M. Zorn (1914).
The hymn stanzas are from *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1918).
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