



# The Message of the Beatitudes in End-of-Life Care for Catholics

# 12

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*There is only Christ: He is everything, and He is in everything.* (Colossians 3:11, New American Bible)

## Contents

12.1	Introduction .....	162
12.2	Living the Beatitudes Through Catholic Social Teaching .....	164
12.3	Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit, for Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven .....	167
12.4	Blessed Are Those Who Mourn, for They Will Be Comforted .....	170
12.5	Blessed Are the Meek, for They Will Inherit the Earth .....	171
12.6	Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness, for They Will Be Filled .....	172
12.7	Blessed Are the Merciful, for They Will Receive Mercy .....	173
12.8	Blessed Are the Pure in Heart, for They Will See God .....	174
12.9	Blessed Are the Peacemakers, for They Will Be Called Children of God .....	175
12.10	Conclusion .....	179
	References .....	179

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## 12.1 Introduction

Jesus professes the Beatitudes not only for an audience present during His sermon on the Galilean hillside but perpetually including the healthcare provider who is about to visit with their Catholic patient. The text of the Beatitudes is a message from the heart of the incarnate Word of God to the heart of every human being. The purpose of this divine teaching is to imbue every personal encounter with the hope of understanding what is meaningful and sacred. In health care settings, it grounds the provider and the patient in wisdom, empathy, and self-compassion.

The Beatitudes are the only liturgical texts of Holy Scriptures that are used in all forms of worship<sup>1</sup> by Catholics. This could be Sunday Mass, the Wedding Mass, or even the Funeral Mass, a reason why Pope Francis declares them to be the “Christian’s identity card.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of familiarizing oneself with the Beatitudes is to understand that the members of a community of faith are in route toward sacredness in a distinct and practical way. This is a community transcending through their trials, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit and through God’s revelation in Jesus, the Savior, and the “great physician.”<sup>3</sup> Only grace and spiritual ties can connect and create such a community even among first-time or only one-time encounters. The extent to which we can recognize the reach of this community depends on the spiritual depth of everyone. The Catholic community is best described in the words of the one recognized as the first black woman Catholic theologian in the United States, Diane Hayes, to be made of “the borne, yet to be born, and those who have already passed over.”<sup>4</sup> This applies not only in parish settings but vigorously in hospital settings. When suffering binds us to such a community, the deep relationship we sense allows us to experience the responsibility of supporting the well-being and healing for each other. This is true even when a physical cure is not probable.

The Beatitudes are a gateway to the source of strong emotions, producing the formation of character and securing hope for anyone facing challenges in life. Each of the nine Beatitudes transforms a negative experience into an opportunity. The richness of the kingdom will replace poverty, grief will be comforted, and the humble will be exalted while no hunger or thirst of any kind will define us. Further rewards are promised for the merciful, pure hearts, and peacemakers. Achieving the blessings mentioned in the Beatitudes, we grow in relationship with the man of suffering and the divine embodiment of compassion, Jesus Christ. He models the trajectory toward ultimate freedom and peace of a “kingdom of heaven” where no persecution can follow, and no evil or false accusation has a place. The following text from the Gospel of Mathew connects every soul with a legacy of vulnerability and powerlessness. The message consecrates transformation through faith, hope,

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<sup>1</sup> Pere A. M. Roquet, “Homilies for Funerals,” (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, paragraph 63.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 2: 17 - “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” New American Bible.

<sup>4</sup> Diana L. Hayes, “Forged in the Fiery Furnace.” (NY, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2012) page 142.

care, community, and shared wisdom of the ages from impoverished realities to the joy and richness of a great reward.

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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven...<sup>5</sup>

In their totality and also one by one, the Beatitudes bequeath blessings of guidance to people searching to attain the kingdom of heaven. Scarce and successive, the pragmatic words of Jesus in the Beatitudes start with the claim for the lost Paradise, without which we have been rendered destitute. The end of the Beatitudes points once more toward the joy of heaven, our eternal home. Coming from God and returning to God is thought in the Catechism of the Catholic Church to be a journey from our place of origin toward a hopeful return to our eternal destination. The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of the “Imago Dei,”<sup>6</sup> the divine image of God “present in every individual. It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the unity of the divine persons among themselves.”<sup>7</sup> The human being in every generation connects with God who created the first people, Adam and Eve. Through the Trinity, we relate to Christ the Redeemer as the new and “last Adam.”<sup>8</sup> The Holy Spirit, the “Comforter,”<sup>9</sup> is sent to us to be a helper in our time of need. This Spirit is the one who bestows graces and gifts as Saint Paul believed: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:1–12.

<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church—# 41.

<sup>7</sup> C.C.C.—# 1702.

<sup>8</sup> C.C.C.—# 359.

<sup>9</sup> John 14: 15 - 26.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 5:5.

## 12.2 Living the Beatitudes Through Catholic Social Teaching

The Beatitudes are traced through Jesus's teaching to the hopes of the prophets from the Old Testament. Additionally, they are connected to social justice through an awareness of human dignity, a belief equally primordial in its origins, captured as core Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principles. Pope Leo XIII marks a new awareness of those principles through his 1891 encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*,<sup>11</sup> which advocated economic distributism. After Pope Leo XIII, papal encyclicals continued to develop the Social Doctrine of the Church. Further roots of CST are traced to Catholic thinkers and theologians such as Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Besides the Western representatives, CST combines concepts of ministry from the Eastern spirituality of the Church developed by Basil the Great and embodies the "holy physicians without the love of silver," Cosmas and Damian, who are strong representatives of the culture and piety of the early Church in the Near East.

As a central element of our faith, CST principles invite us to recognize Christ in the poorest and the vulnerable among us. Profoundly connected with the theological and social understanding of human life and human dignity, CST advocates for every human being from the evident perspective that we are created equal and made in the image and likeness of God. Catholics believe that human life and human dignity are inherently sacred from conception to life's end. In tandem with the Beatitudes, the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church informs and supports a Catholic's way of expressing God's greatest commandment passed on to us through Jesus, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>12</sup>

Christian values and a long tradition of consideration for the other have informed CST principles over the years. Initially starting with the two basic concepts of human dignity and care for the poor, theologians identified several more apostolic beliefs to address the community's needs. Social Doctrine of the Church utilizes the twelve messages listed below to impact the social corollaries of every Catholic. These principles such as the calling to family and community, participation in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the dignity of work, and solidarity with each other as part of God's creation guide Catholics in integrating these into their life's purpose. Sister Juliana Casey IHM in her collection of texts entitled "Food for the Journey" explores these principles and the way they extend to all dimensions of health care within the mission of the Catholic Church. The following are her statements asserting how CST allows us to share the love and peace of Christ to all who are in the world:

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<sup>11</sup> Compendium of the Catholic Social Doctrine of the Church. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021 Washington D.C. page 39.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 22: 37–39.

The documents stress that the social reality is not separated from the religious dimensions of life; rather, it must be transformed in light of the Gospel.

The dignity of the human person is a constant theme in all the documents.

All human persons have inalienable rights which must be respected and protected by the institution of society.

An emerging recognition of the growing gap between the rich and the poor leads to an insistence on a preferential option for the poor.

Love of neighbor, a demand of the Gospel, implies action for justice.

The promotion of the common good is of primary importance.

The principle of subsidiarity (responsibility and decision-making at the level closest to local communities and institutions) should be respected.

The teachings encourage participation in the political process of one's country as a means of achieving the common good.

Economies' justice is vital since the economy exists for the people's betterment.

The writing stress that the world's goods belong to all the world's people all must share the earth's resources.

The documents call for a global solidarity.

Social teachings also call for just peace among men and women.<sup>13</sup>

The above CST statements are a modern-day embodiment of the Beatitudes. The Church is the body of Christ; in that capacity, through its members, it manifests the truth of the Gospel and vision of Christ, not as an ideal but as living testimony in each culture and generation. Each of the Beatitudes has its own "action," inspired by the truth found in a corresponding social doctrine. In the Beatitudes, the task is communal and encompasses the presence of God. Similarly, once they gain traction within the communities whom they inspire, CST takes the form of a search and longing for God. The desire to do God's will cannot be satiated by anything else until it is addressed thoroughly, even when it requires sacrifice. The detriment of self is not limited to trivial approaches but witnessing to the presence of God calls for the practice of martyrdom.

Martyrdom is not to be understood only in the conventional way of shedding blood for a cause but in the powerful spiritual denial of self, to witness to the transcendent. The hospital setting provides a keen opportunity to see this acute level of martyrdom. As the Beatitudes state, there is an action of self-giving that allows one to become an earthy vessel of the Holy Spirit. The life of the Italian saint Gemma Galgani captures a narrative of such martyrdom as only a young soul of a mystic living for the sole purpose of uniting herself with Christ can express. An orphan from a young age, Gemma knew tremendous loss, including that of a sibling. After her father's death, poverty was paired with multiple life-threatening

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<sup>13</sup> Juliana Casey, IHM, *Food for the Journey, Catholic Social Teaching and Healthcare of the Poor*, (St. Louis, Eighth Printing, 2014) page 96.

health conditions, including tuberculosis. Gemma suffered greatly in her trials and was able to recover several times from her chronic condition. Toward the end of her life, her earthly calvary involved the experience of the stigmata. Without a known cause, the wounds of the one crucified marked her frail body as an evident connection to the passion of Christ. So intense was she living her last days in union with Jesus that often accounts of bloodstained tears and sweat were witnessed when she was subjected to blasphemies and hateful words by angry people in her underprivileged surroundings.

The last months of her life at the beginning of the twentieth century added the torments brought on by spiritual anguish. So tortured was Gemma by her physical and emotional suffering that one of the nursing sisters caring for her asserted, "We have cared for a great many sick people, but we have never seen anything like this."<sup>14</sup> The inscription on her tomb conveys a complete message about her mystical life and her unwavering faith, "Gemma Galgani of Lucca, a most innocent virgin, while in her 25th year, consumed rather by the fire of Divine Love than by the violence of disease, flew into the arms of her Heavenly Spouse on Holy Saturday, the eleventh of April 1903. Peace be to Thee, O sweet soul, in company with the Angels."<sup>15</sup> The narratives of such profound levels of sufferings inform the Catholic Church in including wholistic care and palliative care as necessities in the approaches of modern medicine to the end-of-life care.

Different kinds of "stigmata" are more familiar to us in the hospital space than the ones mentioned for Saint Gemma. They are caused by the prevalence of an aging population living with the effects of a chronic illness. The suffering brought on by the pathology of the disease leaves stigmata-like marks on our flesh. A neuropathic foot wound caused by damage due to diabetes. An unstageable pressure sore experienced by those whose blood supply to the tissue is cut off when bedridden. A side wound is caused when chest tubes are needed to drain blood, fluid, or air from around the lungs or heart. The crown of thorns can be associated with a shunt surgically placed. Modern medicine trying to prolong life leaves deep marks on the body of those who are compromised and started the journey to return to God.

Facing one's suffering and potential demise while in reverence to the truth carried by the message of the Beatitudes is an experience that has become more crucial than ever. It is a time of witnessing beyond one's faith and opening the potential for each of the protagonists in the tragedies of life to turn humbly toward Jesus, who came into this world to be like us in all aspects of humanity except for sin. In healthcare activities, one enters in dialogue with Christ Himself. Whenever we provide care to one of "the least of the brethren,"<sup>16</sup> we provide care to Him. A family conference to address treatment goals, complete one's advance care planning, bedside rounds, collaborating with a spiritual care provider and including

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<sup>14</sup> "The Holy Death of St Gemma Galgani". 2022. [Stgemma.galgani.com. https://www.stgemma.galgani.com/2008/09/holy-death-of-st-gemma-galgani.html](https://www.stgemma.galgani.com/2008/09/holy-death-of-st-gemma-galgani.html).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 25: 40.

local clergy in bioethical dilemmas are as integral to providing care as any direct treatment. Further, each one of these healthcare activities, when provided for a Catholic, carries the weight of the Beatitudes and Catholic Social Teaching all at once.

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### 12.3 Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit, for Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

How does one relate to the kingdom of heaven? The answer is a balanced path through life driven by the hope to attain immediate joy and eternal happiness, driven by a spiritual desire to meet God face to face. The kingdom of heaven appears to take form for those looking beyond themselves or their comfort zone. Knowing the mission of Jesus who sent his apostles to all nations to preach<sup>17</sup> the good news of salvation allows us to understand the kingdom of heaven as starting with a relationship. The Gospel of Christ encourages a glance deep into the extent of our hearts to find where we locate our wellbeing in life. Some material comforts in life bring a false sense of security, as Pope Francis reminds us that “wealth ensures nothing.”<sup>18</sup> If riches are poverty, no material wealth can transport us into the kingdom of heaven. What remains an actual value in life is the relationship with the other. As it is experienced in the story of the Good Samaritan, the kingdom of heaven starts with the care provided to a stranger who is in need. A day does not go by when working in a healthcare facility where we can escape meeting another human being who is downtrodden.

Recognizing another’s poverty is empathy in motion externally but at the same time internally directed toward oneself. The vulnerability we feel when we are not running or hiding away from poverty, whenever and however we encounter it, becomes the richness that we share in the world where “moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.”<sup>19</sup> There is belongingness with the *Christ among us*<sup>20</sup> as enunciated by the title of the book written by Anthony Wilhelm in his own awareness of this fact. Acknowledging this affinity to the human family is extremely important in healthcare settings. It creates trust among people and goes so much farther than any transactional relationship. As we concede to self and the world, it becomes transformative that we are becoming poor in spirit, entering the realm of discomfort, exposed to frailty, suffering, and scandalized by the human condition. Thus, we are one with those we meet in our clinics and overwhelmed by illnesses in the hospital beds.

The inherent dignity of every human person, the core of the CST, connects significantly with this Beatitude as it captures the destiny of every person which is the kingdom of heaven. Along with the care of the body, the care of the soul has a

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<sup>17</sup> Mark 16:15.

<sup>18</sup> Apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, paragraph 68.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 6: 20.

<sup>20</sup> Wilhelm, Anthony J. 2013. *Christ Among Us*. [United States]: HarperOne.

place of great importance in the hospital setting. Health care providers can assist the Catholic believer to receive sacramental ministry and sometimes to complete their sacramental formation before the end of life. A catechumen is a faithful Christian who was not baptized yet and who is actively seeking to be baptized and to enter the Catholic Church. With the intent of the Catholic Church, the Trinitarian formula, (“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”), and the use of clean water even a person of a different faith can validly baptize a Catholic in case of an emergency situation. This openness to the divine grace transforms human relationships. In this transformation, social reality ceases to be separate from the religious dimensions of life.

It is important to note that the religious identity of a Catholic extends over more than twenty rites from among whom the Roman Rite is the largest. Catholic faith supports a diverse practice of spiritualities like Latin, Byzantine, Arabic, or Syro-Malabar, to mention just a few. Each of those main spiritualities connected with the apostles’ inculturation of the healing ministry of Christ further sustains local spiritualities. Saints developed them through religious practices, inspiring the world through beauty, strength, and wisdom. Within the Latin Rite of the Church, we find eremitic, Benedictine, or Dominican spiritualities from the first centuries of Christianity. Some spiritualities connect with the Middle Ages and saints like Ignatius of Loyola for the Jesuit spirituality or Teresa of Avila for the Carmelite spirituality. Contemporary times brought to us Taizé and Opus Dei, among other such spiritual developments that inspire a Catholic to live following the values of the Gospel. The light of the Gospel renews every heart that it encounters “for we walk by faith, not by sight.”<sup>21</sup> This is an act of courage and of faith formation as the Scripture continues: “we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord.”<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, the CST addressing the care of the poor also applies within this first Beatitude as it points to the growing gap between the rich and the impoverished, which leads to the declaration of the preferential option for the care of needy within the Church. This approach is informed by a physician–patient relationship based on listening deeply to what is before you. Mindful of the challenges faced by providers in offering this type of care, we must stay vigilant to the potential of only seeing a narrow perspective on suffering that is devoid of the full humanity of the patient. This Beatitude of human poverty when integrated into healthcare practices allows the building of enriching professional relationships through deep listening. The common pursuit of the kingdom of heaven honors the richness of the patient’s religious identity despite the poverty imposed by illness.

To recognize that the foundation of our being is not in ourselves but in God is to know our ultimate dependence. This is absolute poverty, knowing we are ultimately dependent on God’s graciousness. Poverty knows that we cannot go at it alone and that we have needs that can be fulfilled by unity only with the

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<sup>21</sup> 2 Corinthians 5: 7.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 5: 8.



source of life. For any patient, chronic and terminal illness is an experience of true poverty, the ultimate letting go and final act of surrender. Dependency upon others is part of the human condition and is not an affront to human dignity. The example of Pope John Paul II offers a retrospective look to the life of a man who used his pontificate as an inspiration in all areas of public and private life. Devested of his former prominence by a cruel disease, the suffering induced by Parkinson took away from him any lasting vigor. He started his pontificate with a strong determination to persuade all Catholic clergy from direct participation in world politics. His intention was not to weaken the influence of Catholic Social Teaching globally but to unify the church around its moral authority. He hoped for the Catholic social doctrine to be delivered in all sectors of life with the foremost political authority of the Vatican, unaltered by any local and international politics.

In the early part of the 1980s, John Paul II survived a couple of attempts on his life. The most damaging was an assassination attempt by 23-year-old Mehmet Ali Agca, who shot him in the abdomen from a close distance, nearly killing him. The Pope later publicly forgave his aggressor who attempted to take his life on the feast day of the Virgin of Fátima. John Paul II expressed his gratitude to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus who saved his life that day by protecting him from the damages of the gunshot to his vital organs. Years later, in May 2000, the Vatican officially announced a direct correlation between the mysterious third message the children's visionaries received from Mary at Fátima, Portugal, in 1917, as being a vision of the assassination attempt against the Polish Pope. The final years of his papacy were also crucial as the Pope strongly emphasized a message of nonviolence, reflecting a concern nurtured by his personal experiences of his homeland under Nazi and Soviet occupants. His repeated appeals for mercy on behalf of prisoners facing capital punishment were combined with a similar plea for solidarity in a world where confession and religion should never emanate sentiments of violence of any kind.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the once robust John Paul II was visibly affected by his long battle with Parkinson's disease. Multiple medical procedures further diminished his vitality and rigorous schedule. With the entire world watching him, the Pope insisted on sharing how his perceived suffering was a part of his ministry of solidarity with those who were aging and forgotten by society. Faced with the option to resign, he chooses to respond to those who encouraged him to retire by retorting back, "Si crollo, crollo,"<sup>23</sup> meaning "If I collapse, I collapse." It was moving to follow his last years of life impacted by old age and disease. He continued to appear before enormous crowds gathered to worship and visit with him. During a last public Mass celebrated in his homeland in 2002, more than two million people gathered to participate in the holy mysteries of a shared faith in Christ. By 2003, his public appearances only captured him sitting. His last Easter in 2005, following a tracheotomy, he was limited to only sharing a gesture

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<sup>23</sup> "A Fitting And Fit Patron: Pope St. John Paul II". 2022. *Thomas Aquinas College*. <https://www.thomasaquinas.edu/news/fitting-and-fit-patron-pope-st-john-paul-ii>.

of blessing from his papal apartment window, not being able to speak any words to the crowds gathered. With the end of his life near, he remained in his Vatican residence in accordance with his expressed wishes of where he wanted to die.

John Paul II impacted Catholic bioethics not only through theology and Catholic morality but through his witness to the role of suffering. The use of pain medication at the end of life are connected to developing bioethics tenets through his experience and his teachings. He advocated for managing pain and strong palliative care availability that allows the person to prepare for death and maintain consciousness if possible. His example inspired in the Church the seeking for the balance between facing death free of pain, when possible, yet not with the primary goal of hastening the dying process. Thus, the deliberate administration of a lethal dose of pain medication is not morally permissible. The claim for mercy killing was met in the ideology of John Paul II with awareness of a failure to recognize that genuine compassion leads to sharing another's pain.

Blessed are those who are convinced of their basic dependance on God, whose lives are emptied of all that does not matter, those for whom the riches of this world just isn't that important. The kingdom of heaven is theirs.

(Source Unknown)

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## **12.4 Blessed Are Those Who Mourn, for They Will Be Comforted**

Grief is at the center of this Beatitude. No one enters stages of grief intentionally, and no one witnesses stages of grief without some way to retort. Often our experience of grief or response to it is unpredictable. The CST that offers guidance and connects with the wisdom of this Beatitude is solidarity. Christ came to Earth with the spirit of solidarity to experience the human condition firsthand. In doing so, He leads us through His passion, death, and resurrection and positively influences those facing death. Healthcare providers can connect in exploring the heavy emotions of grief with the help of scriptural text like the Psalms, first with the internal process of confronting their mortality and then as an outward expression of solidarity with the other. The stages of grief are responses to the finality of death. Each stage creates isolation around the person's individual story. The individual in the dying process and those accompanying the person often are left without emotional resources to continue that dialogue. The dialogue that breaks through this isolation is compassionate and relational, as noted with this Beatitude.

Thus, solidarity through empathy is a connector between the provider and the patient, extending beyond their relationship to include the family, loved ones, and community. This connection transcends generations, encompassing the entire Church and in communion with the saints. The communion of saints for Catholics holds a depth of connection that provides individuals a certitude that they are never

alone. Thus, the litany of saints is a devotional offered at the end of life which can bring comfort and connection to these holy men and women.

Blessed are those who wear compassion like a garment, those who have learned  
how to find themselves by losing themselves in another's sorrow.  
For they shall receive comfort. (Source Unknown)

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## 12.5 Blessed Are the Meek, for They Will Inherit the Earth

This Beatitude connects with the CST principle stating that all human persons have inalienable rights which must be respected and protected by all the institutions of any society. Often our patients end up being known by room numbers, diagnosis, or labels like “frequent flyers” which denies the depth of their humanity. This diminishment of seeing the fullness of their personhood does not support their ability to show meekness. The inheritance of the Earth promised to the meek is a return to the bliss of paradise Adam and Eve inherited in their relational meekness toward God. Their simplicity relied on their intimate relationship with God for their sustenance. The provider's presence contains the hope for another hour or day of life or even for complete recovery. In supporting the rights of every patient, the healthcare environment, including every conversation between the patient and provider, becomes a sacred encounter. This encounter holds an opportunity for grace, “an amazing grace” that restores that inheritance. Patient advocacy becomes a crucial element in securing their inheritance. A provider leading by example demonstrates how to honor the patient's dignity and inalienable rights guiding others to do the same. Thus, the providers come to be champions of that meekness, utilizing their authority to protect and share in the sacred encounter. In knowing that harmony between us is essential, we continue our advocacy in the complex topic of racism and need for equity in the healthcare. Our combined well-being depends on building identical opportunities for everyone. If we are to surrender to the spirit of God in our modesty, we are to acknowledge the sin of racism inside and outside the walls where we heal. Racism is currently continuing to occur all around us. Without awareness of how it continues, we end up being engaged in it, witnessing it, or our work of healing is affected by it. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church addresses racism in the pastoral letters, “Brothers and Sisters to Us” and “Open Wide Our Hearts.” Both documents of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops outline the fact that racism is a sin, and the enduring call is to love and the fervent encouragement of continued dialogue among all people of God.

Known at birth as Joseph de Veuster, Saint Damien of Molokai was born in Belgium and died in 1889 in Molokai, Hawaii. Fr. Damien was a missionary priest and an icon of true mercy in action recognized today for how he devoted his life to the care of individuals in Hawaii suffering from leprosy. In 2009 he was recognized as a saint of the Catholic Church. His compassion during his work provided spiritual, physical, and emotional comfort to those suffering from the

debilitating and incurable disease that exiled them to the Kalaupapa. He served as both pastor and physician to the colony, undertaking significant projects to better the conditions there. He improved water, food supplies, and housing arrangements for those left by the society to die in misery. For the children who were left without parents because of the ravages of disease, he founded two orphanages. He received assistance from other priests for only a few years of his total of sixteen years on Molokai. In 1884 he contracted leprosy and refused to leave those he cared for and subsequently died. He was buried at the colony as he requested, continuing to be a consoling presence to those he loved and cared for even from beyond the grave.

Blessed are those who know that all they are is a gift from God; and so they can be content with their greatness and their smallness,

Knowing themselves and being true to themselves for they

Shall have the earth for their heritage.

(Source Unknown)

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## 12.6 Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness, for They Will Be Filled

In healthcare we are often confronted by the disparities and inequities of care. When the focus is on healing the body, we also know that illness can often be brought on by a lack of access to resources in our society. Though the scripture is filled with images of abundance at the table where all are welcome, the reality in our world is that people rarely experience that level of equality. Being mindful of these disparities promotes communion as a symbol of unity. Holy Communion is the pinnacle of this spiritual union. Mindful of this, every encounter is an opportunity to raise the awareness of that justice that brings us into unity. The unity is between peers and individuals, but also with God. A healthcare provider mindful of these inherited disparities or systemic inequalities would include a thirst for righteousness and unity in the plan of care.

Coming to the altar table to receive Holy Communion is the source that provides nourishment and encouragement for a life lived by grace for a Catholic. The hospital bed is another altar table of sorts. So important is this sacrament of the Eucharist that it is combined within the last three sacraments a Catholic would receive at the end of life. Traditionally known as the Last Rites, a priest confers to the dying Catholic the last Holy Communion they will receive on Earth, known as *Viaticum*, along with reconciliation (confession) and anointing of the sick. Often in contemporary hospital settings, it is rare when all three can be provided together at the end of life. For example, an individual on life support cannot make a valid confession or receive Holy Communion. Also, in times of emergency, it is not always possible to wait for a priest to arrive in time. Thus, a Deacon or an extraordinary

minister of the Eucharist can provide Holy Communion for an alert and oriented patient without providing the other two sacraments. Regardless of the pressures of the moment, a healthcare provider could be mindful that, ideally, all three or any of these preparatory sacraments provide spiritual nourishment for the end-of-life journey. Creating space for this sacred ritual will quench the spiritual hunger and thirst for a patient who unites with the Divine through these transformative sacraments.

Blessed are those who are hungry for goodness.

Those who never get enough of God and truth

And righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

(Source Unknown)

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## 12.7 Blessed Are the Merciful, for They Will Receive Mercy

This Beatitude points to the wisdom that mercy is an investment. We are all called to show mercy; when it is combined with power, which can take many forms in healthcare, opportunities develop that can yield substantial systemic changes. At all levels of healthcare, including those with political reach, it is important to remember that power is not lasting. Thus, we have a limited time to guide our power through acts of mercy for the good of the other.

Life experience can teach us to show mercy, increasing the chances that when we bestow mercy the compassion we need will be reciprocated in our time of vulnerability. This text provides a foundation for viewing life through the virtues of love, faith, and charity. When integrated into life, these provide a lens of mercy that crosses generations. Often a provider is faced with two different approaches when delivering care for those who are suffering. One includes judgment, focusing on what the patient has done to cause this. The other asks the provider to look into the case through the lens of mercy, which leads to a new depth of understanding that can render even the best of us victim to humanity’s limitations. In mercy, we make room to seek healing to childhood and secondary traumas, abuse, neglect at different stages of development and through all our relationships and the anxieties that they can produce.

The parable of the Good Samaritan<sup>24</sup> is central to the teachings of mercy. Jesus telling the story gives so many details of how far the path of mercy can reach. The Good Samaritan never wondered whose fault it was that left the man “half-dead,” and remains removed from status or power. Mercy is a form of claiming freedom. It makes room for forgiveness and reconciliation while empowering even the victim and the oppressed to regain inherent dignity. The Good Samaritan uses

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<sup>24</sup> Luke 10: 25–37.

everything in his possession to continue that work of healing by giving his silver to the innkeeper and promising to pay the full cost of the treatment needed. Mercy is thus deeply rooted with the CST that implies an influence in the political and legislative process as a means of achieving the common good. Showing mercy is not limited to only citizens or paying patients, but to those who are undocumented and uninsured. Human dignity, hope for transformation, and an openness of the heart for the other support this understanding of mercy. Such feelings overcome limits imposed by the challenging circumstances of a hospital environment. The care provider moved by mercy seeks a renewed understanding of the patient that allows freedom and transformation to surface.

Blessed are the merciful, those who remember  
 how much has been forgiven them, and are able  
 to extend this forgiveness into the lives of others  
 for they too shall receive God's mercy.

(Source Unknown)

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## 12.8 Blessed Are the Pure in Heart, for They Will See God

Cleanliness is essential in the hospital environment. Beyond sanitation, purity can create a sterile environment conducive to eradicating harmful organisms. Purity of heart assures the advancement of medicine and the CST principle of subsidiarity. Following this principle, responsibility and decision-making remain at the closest level connected with the situation at hand. It benefits the immediate community and the institutions immediately involved. This principle respects parties engaged in decision making, requiring a single-heart approach. This Beatitude guarantees the opportunity to see God present to all of us when we put ourselves in the service of others and seek the greater good.

For a Catholic, there is no better example of purity of heart than Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is a close ally to every individual and a mother to all through Jesus. Many Catholics will relate to her comforting attributes and consider her an intercessor before her son. Many of Mary's devotions and liturgical practices are rooted in her messages given to the people where she appeared always near and identified with the simple and the vulnerable of the land. The diverse spiritualities she inspires through her apparitions transcend national and cultural boundaries, often surprising many through their diversity. Known as Our Lady, Mary brings healing through a profound understanding of God's love and concern for humanity. Water from Lourdes, France where she appeared to a young shepherd girl, the rosary beads, a miraculous medal or the scapular are all symbols of how a patient connects and benefits from the assistance of a powerful mediator of grace. Always a source of peace and comfort, Mary is present through liturgical art and devotions, icons, or rosary beads. Such spiritual items will often accompany a Catholic from

the beginning of life into the next life. In a hospital room, they are visible symbols of one's faith and point to sources of hope and healing. The health care provider offers a Catholic an example of maternal and unconditional love and compassion when invoking the gentle presence of Mary through the Hail Mary prayer. This prayer ends with the sentence: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and the hour of our death."

Blessed are those whose hearts are free and simple, those who  
have smashed all false images and are seeking honestly for truth,  
for they shall see God." (Source Unknown)

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## 12.9 Blessed Are the Peacemakers, for They Will Be Called Children of God

Social teachings in the Catholic Church give primary importance to promoting the common good. Manifesting a global call to solidarity and justice for all, the Catholic Church looks at the impact of our economy on people's betterment and the communal sharing of goods. This Beatitude calls us to engage in work toward peace on a global scale. It is an effort attained not through war or conquering, but through justice and solidarity. It is a teaching that is grounded in our own internal peace and harmony. In the economy of salvation, the coherence between head, gut, and heart is needed before one can move with peace outward toward cohesion with another human being. This locus ensures attention is paid to understanding the other and toward gracious discernment, commitment to unity, and providing loving care among all people.

A peacemaker will not be satisfied with walls that rise because of desperation or from facing pain and potential death. Walls do not allow the establishment of connection from one heart to another. This isolation produces different negative emotions and facilitates the development of illness, promoting loneliness, fear, and misunderstandings. The Catholic Church's commitment to whole person care provides the antidote to this type of separation through the *Ethical and Religious Directives*. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote this document to safeguard the sacredness of life from birth to natural death. Spiritual obligations, clinical responsibilities, and pastoral guidelines provide a source of clarity through the 77 directives, which act as a connector between Catholic and non-Catholic and institutional and community partners. A shared understanding of dialogue supports the connection and secures freedom to ask questions that allow all parties to remain open to learning about each other. Where there is a stalemate, one must stay present to this tension until a peaceful solution is achieved.

The *Ethical Religious Directives* are an open invitation to nurture a professional encounter addressing Catholic moral dilemmas in hospital settings. Mindful of differences between what is casual for health care settings and what could become of

grave moral importance, peace comes once an effort is made to recognize the Holy Spirit of God at work. An aspect of seeking peace could be a “holy indifference,”<sup>25</sup> which is a process of prayer and dialogue that places value on opinions contrary to ours or toward those we instinctually detest. Accepting one’s treatment preferences and the provider’s moral obligations even when we disagree is a form of serenely recognizing that we are all children of God. Considering the importance of life events through the prism of prayer is a common practice among Catholics. Saint Francis of Assisi left a timeless prayer for internal peace and calm. This invocation is well known, and it is widely practiced among Catholics and other than Catholics. The St. Francis prayer is used with the hope that will be an aid to restore peace in the tumultuous environment of health care.

### **The Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi:**

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
 Where there is hatred, let me sow charity;  
 Where there is injury, pardon;  
 Where there is error, truth;  
 Where there is doubt, faith;  
 Where there is despair, hope;  
 Where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.  
 O, Divine Master,  
 Grant that I may not so much seek  
 to be consoled, as to console;  
 To be understood as to understand; To be loved as to love;  
 For it is in giving that we receive;  
 It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
 it is in dying to ourselves that we are born to eternal life.  
 Amen.

Blessed are the creators of peace, those who build roads that unite  
 rather than walls that divide, those who bless the world with the  
 healing power of their presence, for they shall be called children of God.

(Source Unknown)

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<sup>25</sup> “The Secret To Holy Indifference - Word On Fire”. 2022. *Word On Fire*. <https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/the-secret-to-holy-indifference>.



Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

An anonymous proverb stating “hurt people hurt people” was later publicized by Dr. Sandra Wilson<sup>26</sup> in the book with the same title. The saying represents a sad truth often experienced firsthand in a place where hurt is predominant as in the case of hospital environment. Catholics recognize a sign of victory over hurt, suffering, and death in the cross of Jesus. Often present wherever Catholics experience suffering, the cross exists to bring hope. An image of a contemporary traumatic event is one of Fr. Michael Judge, Catholic priest and New York Fire Department chaplain designated as “Victim 0001” of the 9–11 attacks on the United States in 2001. Though not the first to be killed in the attacks, Fr. Judge was the first verified fatality in being the first body recovered and identified among the victims. Moments before the collapse of the first tower, he was aiding other victims. A healing image shared from the place where Fr. Judge and so many died that day is the Ground Zero Cross. This formation of steel beams found among the debris of the World Trade Center site in Manhattan continues to be exhibited since 2014 at the National September 11 Museum as a symbol of hope and resilience.

For Catholics, the cross is an altar, and its wood is a symbol of healing. It is a healing that is deeply rooted in ancient tradition; the wound was created by the fruit of the tree from which Adam and Eve ate, disobeying God's in the garden of paradise. As people who live inspired by the sign of the cross, Catholics are called to be instruments of God's grace in the world. It is the cross that we hold in our hand in times of suffering, one that blesses us in times of prayer or comforts us when it is placed on our loved one's coffin as we say our final farewell. In all these profound experiences and more, we are reminded of the victory of Christ over death and suffering.

We feel the pressures of discomfort when we are transgressing against the divine law. We are oppressed when the natural law of doing good and avoiding evil is not preserved in the world. We react when we are persecuted or reviled by fellow humans. Despite this pressure and discomfort, connecting with our human dignity blesses us. We are restored in Him who was crucified for our transgressions, and with Him and through Him we ascend peacefully over our trials and tribulations. The exchange that takes place when evil persecutes us or we are reviled by fellow humans, we feel blessed acknowledging that our human experience is united and restored by Jesus who died for our sins and rose again to ascend peacefully over our trials and tribulations. A constant theme in all the documents throughout Catholic Social Teaching, human dignity demands a level of respect calibrated according to how others honor or denigrate us. Facing the cross, we can accept hostility and anger without attempting to respond to hurt in kind. The last two

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<sup>26</sup> Wilson, Sandra D. 2015. *Hurt People Hurt People*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Discovery House.

Beatitudes combined bring once again the notion of martyrdom to the surface, framed between the love for righteousness and the damages brought on by false accusations. Persecuted by the violence of illness, a Catholic can connect with the suffering Jesus endured without fault of his own, to give us strength when we have no other avenue but the path of acceptance.

The history of the Church demonstrates how the practice of holiness rises to the needs created by our situation through multiple accounts. Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, known by her affectionate name as the Lily of the Mohawks, brings her example to the litany of so many saints. A life of holiness reconciles the cross, anywhere where the human spirit embraces it. She was born from a Christian Algonquin mother who was taken captive by the Iroquois and made to be the wife to the chief of the Mohawk clan. Kateri came into the world among one of the boldest tribes belonging to the Five Nations. When she was only four, Tekakwitha lost her immediate family, parents, and little brother during a smallpox epidemic. The disease affected her greatly, leaving her disfigured and partially blind.

Kateri's continued contact with Christian principles shared with her by Jesuit missionaries moved her toward acceptance. One of her commitments through her baptism as a Catholic was refusing to work on Sunday. Kateri received no food that day. Through determination fueled by love, her life in grace flourished though she received consistent resistance from her own family. She shared with her spiritual father that she often meditated on the great dignity of being united with Christ through her baptism. Despite lack of education and constant humiliation and harassment, God's love for human beings impacted Kateri. Refusing to be married and returning to a life of solitude, she prayed in the wilderness for hours every day which instilled further in her heart the dignity of her people. Kateri adopted a practice of severe fasting as penance to persuade her nation to know the message of the Beatitudes. The Lily of the Mohawks died the afternoon before Holy Thursday at the age of 24 on April 17, 1680. A Jesuit priest who attended to her sacramental needs at the time of her death recounts how her emaciated face changed the minute after her passing. The serenity of her death transformed the ravages of a life of severe suffering and became "like the face of a healthy child." The deep lines of suffering, pockmark scars left by smallpox, disappeared as a touch of a serene smile remain upon her face.

Blessed are those whose love has been tried like gold in the furnace,  
and found to be precious, genuine, and lasting, those who have lived  
their belief out loud No matter what the cost or pain.

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Source Unknown)

## 12.10 Conclusion

Diverse narratives from the last days on earth of venerated Catholic saints intertwined with Catholic Social Doctrine support the integration of the Beatitudes in daily life in the clinical settings of contemporary health care. The history of the Catholic identity proves to be inspired by the authenticity of the actions prescribed in the message of the Beatitudes. The potential is not entirely exhausted, remaining open through human connection to support our individual and communal dignity. It eradicates every form of poverty infringing on our potential to experience the gift of life to its fullness. The challenge remains before us and is not determined by legislation or political formalities. It is offered and attainable to all who approach life with humility, desiring for peace, seeking wisdom, and knowing that alone we are defeated by limitations. Caring for one another and our vocations, we pave the way for this earth to be like the “kingdom of heaven”. In the process, we learn the meaning of compassion as it helps to restore and heal the ravages of illness and suffering.

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