

As a parish we have been hosting a deanery catechetical programme called *Sowing the Seeds*. Each session was led by a different priest and the session I got to lead was on The Moral Life. I concluded the session by reading that gospel passage that we have just heard. For me, those, what we normally call the Beatitudes sum up everything that we mean by the Moral Life.

One person, though, objected. How could anyone object to the beatitudes? But then it transpired that what he was objecting to was not the beatitudes themselves but the translation of the beatitudes. And I think he is absolutely right. *How happy are the poor in spirit...*

*Happy the gentle...*

*Happy those who mourn...*

This is what most people want - happiness. And the great project of our times is to rollout this happiness for as many people as possible. But is this what Jesus really meant? Isn't there something rather more to our faith than the promotion of happiness?

Would it not be better to say: *Blessed are the poor in spirit...*

*Blessed are the gentle...*

*Blessed are those who mourn...*

*Blessed are the pure in heart...*

Just what blessedness is, is difficult to say. It certainly can't be engineered by politicians, bureaucrats or therapists, or even by clergy. And it's certainly something beyond human feelings and emotions. Blessedness has something to do with holiness, something to do with prayer, something to do with a particular lifestyle, something to do with openness, to self-giving and to love.

Happiness may well be, and very often is, the by-product of this blessedness. But we don't come to Mass to get a little dose of happiness. We come to Mass to draw closer to the one who suffered and died for us on the Cross.

To put it another way, it's like falling in love. We don't fall in love in order to upgrade our happiness quota. Our reasons for falling in love go well beyond mere happiness. We hope falling in love will make us happy but it is by no means guaranteed.

My favourite beatitude is no 6. *Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God*. Here is the alpha and the omega of my spiritual life, a shocking awareness of my own sin, my own impurity, my lack of integrity, my lack of humanity, and yet also that tiniest glimpse of God in all his wonder and glory. To have seen even this faintest of visions is often more than my poor little heart can take, but I would not have it any other way.

This is the moral life - not simply trying to maximise happiness or live life by a set of rules, but to live a journey, a journey into that vision, a journey into union, a journey into love.

Fr Michael