

Rob Reiner's tongue-in-cheek fairy tale, "The Princess Bride," is one of my all-time favorite movies. One character, an outlaw named Vizzini, is the brains behind a complex plot to start a war. As the outlaws make their getaway with the princess they have kidnapped, the hero, Westley, gets past Vizzini's every attempt to stop him.

And each time Westley succeeds and gets closer, Vizzini blurts out: "Inconceivable!" At one point, Westley chases the outlaws up a rope to the top of a huge cliff. At the top, Vizzini cuts the rope that Westley is climbing.

When he looks over the edge and sees Westley clinging to the cliff face, he says: "He didn't fall? Inconceivable!" To which one of his partners turns to him and says: "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

Just so, when we hear Jesus saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "blessed are those who mourn," "blessed are the meek," that English word "blessed" that Jesus keeps using can be misleading. If we expect this passage to be a lesson on how to earn God's grace; if we imagine that Jesus is simply teaching us how to behave properly; if we only hear Jesus telling us to try hard to live this way, we miss what is really going on.

The word that Jesus keeps using does not mean what we think it means.

Matthew's Greek uses the word "makarios," a poetic word that refers to the blissfulness of the Divine. The word implies a fullness of satisfaction and in the context of Christian scripture, the word indicates a distinctive joy that comes through participation in the heavenly kingdom. The Greek word is a translation of a poetic Hebrew word, "ašrê" that means "to find the right road."

And so, the blessing that Jesus refers is two-fold; first, the satisfaction of the realm of God already at hand among us and within us as we seek the path laid out for us. And second, the satisfaction that will come when the realm of God comes in its fullness.

The realm of God is already and not yet.

Once every three years, we get this version of the Beatitudes on the feast of All Saints. We hear this Gospel reading on a day set aside to honor the saints because the communion of saints provides a glimpse of God's "always and already" presence in the midst of our "not yet" world. And I'm not referring only to the saints who have gone on to greater glory. We are *all* called to holiness. God does not reserve holy blessedness for those who earn it or for an elite fortunate few.

God offers Divine unity to all of us, "already" and "not yet." Or as John wrote: "Beloved, we are God's children *now*; what we will be has *not yet* become apparent."

Our union is there for us to notice now *and* to be more fully revealed. God, the source of all being, has already poured holiness all around and among us. God, pure consciousness itself, has taken form in our own awareness in the life of Jesus Christ. God, the dynamic energy that inspires our hearts to create beauty and pursue truth, energizes us with the courage to follow the path of sainthood.

Realizing our unity with God motivates us to act like the saints of God's heavenly realm as it is now and as it will be when God's heaven comes in its fullness. So, what does that look like?

Blissful! How blissful are those who realize that we are partakers of the divine nature of God and who help others awaken to it. Also tired, maybe, but blissful still.

How blissful are the destitute and abject in spirit, for theirs is the realm of heaven. There is good news for those who doubt deeply, who are unsure, who still ask questions of God after human answers do not satisfy. Those who are craving God and feeling spiritually empty will be filled with the unanticipated things that God is doing. You are already of heaven and God will guide you and make you a fountain of divine joy for others. You are blessed.

How blissful are those who mourn in protest at the destruction of God's earthly dwelling place, for they will be aided. There is good news for those who lament at the destruction of the place where the children of Israel first worshipped the Holy One. Those who seek the restoration of God's dwelling place on earth will find it. They will find it implanted in their own hearts. They will find it in communities of people who gather in earthly places to give

thanks to the Holy One, to offer their fears and frustrations, to ask for help or to seek forgiveness. You are already of heaven and God will guide you to places that recognize and serve the realm of heaven in its infancy until God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. You are blessed.

How blissful are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth. There is good news for those who do not rely on brute, dominating earthly power. Those who walk quietly on the earth with respect and care will come to notice the astonishing interdependent web of all life. Those who see the sacredness of God's creation will come to understand their role in handing on a legacy of natural beauty. Those who awaken to God's gifts in the resources of the earth will receive them with frugality, share them with gratitude and steward them with appreciation. You are already of heaven and God will accompany you as a companion caretaker of God's abundance. You are blessed.

How blissful are those who hunger and thirst for what is right, for they will feast. There is good news for those who stand up against injustice, for those who ally themselves with people on the margins, because that's where Christ is to be found. There is good news for those who remind us that we can be better to each other, because they are right. Those who strive for justice and peace among all people, and who respect the dignity of every living being will feast on the abundance of God's presence that they will find there. You are already of heaven and God will become your companion in seeking and serving Christ in each other, loving as you are loved. You are blessed.

How blissful are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. There is wonderful news for those who temper rules of impartiality with patient restraint. Those who call for compassion in situations where forgiveness is warranted help to keep supple standards for fairness from slipping into blind, unthinking morality. Those who see that leniency is the counterpart to God's justice will notice and be grateful for every forgiveness granted to themselves and those they love. You are already of heaven and God will be alive in the forgiveness and mercy that you grant to others. You are blessed.

We could continue, but you can see that the word Jesus keeps using means much more than "you have earned" or "you are fortunate" or "favored." There is amazing news for the pure in heart who will see God. There is holy bliss for the peacemakers, who will be called God's children. If you are being

persecuted for the sake of what is right, the realm of heaven is there with you. If you are being reproached, persecuted and falsely accused of evil because you are living out your trust in Christ, don't despair. Instead, rejoice and be glad because you are following the pattern that Jesus and the prophets laid down as the holy path to sainthood.

Jesus Christ *is* God's divine and blissful unity, given to a world still fractured by self-serving power and fear. The saints are those who are aware of our unity with God, and they stand with us as inspiring reminders of who God created us to be. Our own awareness of unity with God is awakened and supported through the communion of the saints in heaven, and also through our communion with each other, the ordinary saints.

Our strength and virtue don't qualify us to be called saints. Our invitation to the path of sainthood is the yearning in our hearts for the God who brings beauty out of dust. Our union and our bliss are strengthened and renewed through the hearing of Holy Scripture and in our taking the Holy Eucharist into ourselves. This is a holy, bliss-filled meal – a beatitude meal: the blessed, broken and given body of Christ.

Come, then, to God's table in the knowledge of what you are now: a child of God. Come filled with joyful awe at the promises that Jesus made on a hilltop overlooking the sea of Galilee. And be aware that even though what we are to be has not yet been revealed to us, here at this table, we become what we receive.

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