

Bulletin Bit
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This past week the students at Vacation Church School have studied the Beatitudes, the “Commandments of Blessedness” as they are sometimes called. We sing the Beatitudes at the Divine Liturgy on Sundays: “Blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are the meek....”

It is very common to refer to the Beatitudes as a ladder ascending from earth to Heaven, from earthly life to Divine life. In this view each of the Beatitudes is a rung, another step, up the ladder and towards God.

It is interesting, if you take this approach, that the top of the ladder contains what might seem to be a surprise. Almost at the top, on rungs six and seven (of nine), we hear “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”; and “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God”. These, it might seem, should be the final rungs of the ladder. After all, what can be higher than seeing God? Or above being a son of God? These, you would think, would be the height of blessedness and the very pinnacle of the ladder of divine ascent.

And yet, there remain two rungs that we must climb beyond these. What are they? Which commandments of blessedness take us even beyond seeing God and being sons of God?

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

The Beatitudes have been called the Gospel in miniature, a microcosm of our Lord's teaching. One of the reasons for this is certainly because the Beatitudes turn our ideas of what a good life looks like completely upside-down. I mean, really, who considers mourners, the meek, the poor in spirit, etc. *blessed*? This is contrary to the prevailing so-called wisdom of the world. And yet here in this microcosm of our Lord's commandments we find the world turned on its head. He is telling us not only that up is down and down is up; He is telling us that *the way* up is to go down. The means of ascent is the path of descent. The way upward to the greatest blessedness is, in truth, the way downward.

And this is precisely why the final two commandments of blessedness are those given above: blessed are the persecuted and the reviled for Christ's sake. These are the highest rungs of blessedness precisely because they share with Christ in the lowest depths of His self-offering love: the Cross. The Cross of Christ, which to the world looks like foolishness and utter defeat and failure, is, in fact, the very depths of the wisdom and love of God. And our descent with Christ into the depths of His suffering love is the means of our ascent to the very highest heights of Divine blessedness.