

6. Introduction to the Fourth Beatitude: A Turning Point in the Path of Discipleship

As we arrive at the fourth Beatitude, something begins to shift.

The first three :

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,”

“Blessed are those who mourn,”

“Blessed are the meek”

focus on the interior journey of surrender and detachment. These aren't just gentle moral statements. They are a radical reordering of the heart — a letting go of the world's most seductive false promises.

Bishop Robert Barron frames it this way: the early Beatitudes are each a “no” to one of the world's idols:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” is a no to wealth — a relinquishing of materialism and the illusion that our worth is measured by what we own.

“Blessed are those who mourn” is a no to good feelings — an acknowledgment that true spiritual life sometimes requires us to sit with sorrow, grief, and longing.

“Blessed are the meek” is a no to power — a refusal to dominate, control, or assert oneself above others.

And now, we come to the fourth Beatitude:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Here we encounter a no to honor — to the desire for approval, applause, recognition, or social status. This hunger is not about being seen as good, but about a genuine longing for what is good — even when no one is watching. It is not driven by pride, but by passion. It is a thirst for things to be right — in the soul, in the family, in the community, in the world.

This Beatitude marks a turning point in the journey. The first three stripped away attachment to wealth, comfort, and power. Now, in the hunger for righteousness, we are filled with something new — a desire not for self, but for God's justice, God's vision, God's will.

It is a bridge Beatitude — connecting the inward emptying with the outward movement of the Spirit. It asks: What do you ache for? What does your soul crave when all distractions are gone? The one who hungers for righteousness may not be satisfied by the world — but they will be satisfied by God.

What Does “Righteousness” Mean in This Beatitude?

When Jesus says,

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,”

he’s not talking about being perfect, nitpicky, or overly religious.

He’s not talking about being scrupulous — a word that means obsessing over small sins or constantly worrying that you’re doing something wrong, even when your conscience is clear.

(Scrupulosity is a kind of spiritual anxiety. But this Beatitude isn’t about that. It’s not about trying to earn God’s love or micromanage our behavior.)

Instead, Jesus is speaking of something much deeper — a desire that touches every part of life.

In Scripture, righteousness means being in right relationship:

with God, with others, and with the world around us. It’s not one thing — it’s a way of living, a way of being.

We can understand righteousness in three dimensions:

1. Righteousness as Right Relationship with God

At its core, righteousness is about alignment with God’s heart.

It’s a longing to know God’s will, to live in friendship with God, to let our lives reflect God’s goodness.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to ache for a deeper relationship with the Divine — to say, “I want to live in a way that pleases You, even when it’s hard, even when no one sees.”

It’s not about being good for appearance or obsessing over whether we’re getting it all right. It’s about being in tune with the One who is good.

2. Righteousness as Living Out God’s Will

Righteousness is not just something we believe — it’s something we do.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness means wanting to live God’s will in real, practical, daily ways, even when it costs us something.

It shows up in:

Acts of forgiveness when we’d rather stay angry

Example: After a close friend gossips behind your back, you’re deeply hurt. But instead of cutting them off or seeking revenge, you choose to speak honestly, offer forgiveness, and give the relationship a chance to heal — even though your feelings aren’t fully resolved yet.

Speaking the truth when silence would be easier

Example: At a family gathering, someone makes a harmful comment about immigrants. You feel the tension in the room but gently speak up to offer a different, more compassionate perspective — not to shame, but to offer truth.

Choosing compassion over judgment

Example: A coworker misses a deadline again. Instead of assuming they're lazy, you ask if everything is okay and learn they've been caring for a sick parent. You offer help, not criticism.

Remaining faithful when it would be easier to walk away

Example: You've been volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club for years, and lately you feel tired and unappreciated. It would be easier to step back completely, but after prayer, you realize God is inviting you to remain — not out of obligation, but out of love and quiet perseverance.

This kind of righteousness isn't self-righteousness — and it's not about being scrupulous. It's about obedience, integrity, and a willingness to be formed by the Gospel, even in the quiet or hidden moments of our lives.

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3. Righteousness as Justice — Social, Ethical, and Spiritual

In the Bible, righteousness and justice are inseparable.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is also to long for a world made right — a world where the poor are lifted, the broken are healed, the marginalized are seen, and the powerful are held accountable.

It's not enough for our own hearts to be right with God — righteousness demands that we care about the systems, structures, and sufferings of the world around us.

This is where *Catholic Social Teaching* enters in — with its call to dignity, solidarity, the common good, and a preferential option for the poor.

To hunger for righteousness is to be restless for justice.

It's to look at the world as it is — and long for what it could be, through God's grace and our hands.