

(Transcription)

November 1999

Word of Life

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Mt. 5:8)

Jesus begins his preaching with the Sermon on the Mount. On a hill near Lake Tiberius, not far from Capernaum, Jesus sat down, as was customary for teachers, and proclaimed the beatitudes to the crowds. The word 'blessed' had been heard throughout the Old Testament. It spoke of the exaltation of the one who, in the widest variety of ways, fulfilled the Word of the Lord.

The beatitudes of Jesus were partly an echo of the ones the disciples already knew. But for the first time they heard that not only were the pure in heart worthy of going up the hill of the Lord, as the psalmist sang (Ps. 24:4), but they could even see God. What kind of purity could be so sublime as to deserve so much? Jesus would explain it several times during the course of his preaching. Let's try to follow him so we can draw from the source of true purity.

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First of all, Jesus points out the very best way to be purified: "You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you." (Jn 15:3) His Word, more than the practice of religious rites, is what purifies our inner self. The Word of Jesus is not like human words. Christ is present in his Word, as he is present, in a different way, in the Eucharist. Through his Word Christ enters within us and, provided we allow him to act, he makes us free from sin and therefore pure in heart.

Thus purity is the fruit of living the Word, of living all the Words of Jesus which free us from our so-called attachments, which we inevitably fall into if our hearts are not in God and in his teachings. These can be attachments to things, to people and to ourselves. But if our heart is focused on God alone, all the rest falls away.

To achieve this, it can be useful to repeat throughout the day to Jesus, to God, the invocation of the psalm that says: "You, Lord, are my only good!" (see Ps. 16:2) Let's try to say it often, especially when various attachments seek to pull our heart towards those images, feelings and passions that can blur our vision of what is good and take away our freedom.

Are we inclined to look at certain types of posters or television programmes? Let's stop and say to him: "You, Lord, are my only good" and this will be the first step that will take us beyond self, by re-declaring our love for God. In this way we will grow in purity.

Do we realise sometimes that someone, or something we do, has got in the way, like an obstacle, between us and God, spoiling our relationship with him? That is the moment to say to him: "You, Lord, are my only good." It will help us purify our intentions and regain inner freedom.

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Living the Word makes us free and pure because the Word is love. It is love, with its divine fire, that purifies our intentions and the whole of our inner self, because our 'heart', according to the Bible, is the deepest seat of our intelligence and our will.

But there is a type of love that Jesus commands us to practise and that enables us to live this beatitude. It is mutual love, being ready to give our life for others, following the example of Jesus. This love creates a current, an exchange, an atmosphere characterised above all by transparency and purity,

because of the presence of God who alone can create a pure heart in us (see Ps. 50:12). It is by living mutual love that the Word acts with its purifying and sanctifying effects.

As isolated individuals we are incapable of resisting the world's temptations for long, but in mutual love there is a healthy environment that can protect purity and all other aspects of a true Christian life.

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So, then, the fruit of this constantly re-acquired purity is that we can 'see' God, which means we can understand his work in our lives and in history, hear his voice in our hearts, and recognise him where he is: in the poor, in the Eucharist, in his Word, in our communion with others, in the Church.

It is a foretaste of the presence of God which already begins in this life, as we 'walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor. 5:7), until the time when, 'we will see face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12) forever.

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