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## Is It Wrong to be Happy?

by [Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D.](#)



Beatitude, according to Webster, means perfect blessedness or happiness. But when you read the beatitudes, you seemingly find anything but... It is the poor, the hungry, the weeping and the persecuted who are blessed. In Luke's gospel (Lk 6:20-26), Jesus even adds woes for those who are rich, full, mirthful and popular.



I once heard a preacher say that many of God's people look more liked they've been baptized in pickle juice than in water. Is this holiness? Is piety all about being miserable and glum? What are we to make of these alarming words of Jesus?

The last thing we ought to do is to tame Jesus' hard sayings. The Lion of Judah does not respond favorably when we try to domesticate him. But neither should we be literalists and interpret the beatitudes of the context of the entire Bible. This is one of the great things about the liturgy of the Word. The Church puts three readings together each Sunday that clarify each other.

Jeremiah 17:5-8 helps us see what Jesus is getting at in the Beatitudes: "Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord." Whether our possessions happen to be money, a job, a spouse, or children, they become an obstacle when we find our security and sense of self-worth in them. Our ultimate security can only be in one place, and our natural tendency is to look for it in someone or something we can see. To look for security in an invisible Someone is more than natural-- it is **supernatural**. To do this we need supernatural gifts called faith and hope.



Faith is really about finding our ultimate security and identity in God's love, protection and help. Is it wrong to take pleasure in a good job or a loving spouse? No. But to find your security in them sets you up for heartbreak. Ask the software engineer who was laid off after his job went "offshore." Hope is about what you are looking forward to in the future, about being more excited about the promise of heaven than any other earthly blessing. Is it wrong to look forward to your wedding day, having a baby, landing a better job, or graduating from college? Not at all. But if you think you will find your ultimate fulfillment in these things, you are under a great illusion. Ask the upwardly

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mobile executive who climbs to the top of the corporate ladder only to find emptiness there. Paul said it well—"if our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men." (1Cor 15:19).



We've all been given the supernatural gifts of faith and hope in baptism. But these two virtues are like spiritual muscles that must be exercised and developed. If you don't *use* them, you *lose* them. And the only way to grow them is to put some stress on them. This hurts, of course.

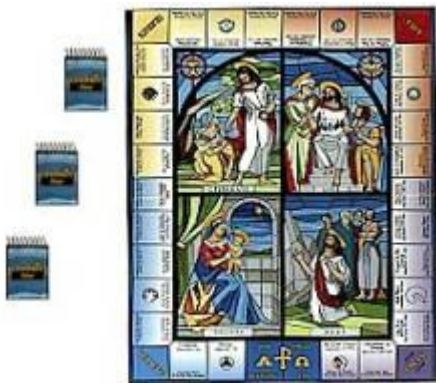
So what have you done lately to develop faith and hope? Or better yet, do you recognize what challenges God has permitted in your life for the purposes of developing your faith and hope? Loss of job, health, loved one, money, popularity--these can be seen just as lamentable annoyances . . . or as opportunities to grow.

When faith and hope are well developed, they impart a strength and a joy that cannot be taken away by the trials and tribulations that devastate superficial happiness. Francis of Assisi had no possessions and was in constant pain in the last few years of his life, and yet was one of the most joyful persons that ever lived. That's because faith and hope matured in him and produced beatitude here and glory in the age to come.

The beatitudes do not demand a morose Christianity. They are all about laying the foundations of an unshakable joy and a peace that passes understanding.

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