



# "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven"

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Every Sunday during the Beatitudes part of the Divine Liturgy, we hear this being chanted:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt 5:3). The same paragraph in Luke 6:20 simply says "Blessed are the poor" (without the "in spirit" part). At first this may seem an insignificant detail, but in essence it makes a world of a difference.

In order to understand this from a deeper perspective, let us start by asking ourselves, what does to be "poor" really mean? If we first get to understand what being poor means, then we will be able to really understand the difference better, and this is very important as many today will misinterpret the words of St Luke.

To be poor means to be living in state of being short of something that is necessary for one's existence. Someone finding himself in this state of "poverty" acknowledges the state he is in by recognizing the fact that something essential is missing in his life, which makes it hard for him to make it without. One who would look upon himself and see no shortcomings would not see himself in a state of being "poor". When the Gospel speaks of "Blessed are the poor" it must be understood that one who hopes to make it to the kingdom of Heaven must have some real sense of poverty about himself, for if he sees himself rich and fulfilled he can't possibly hope to be saved.

Now let us go back to the passage at the beginning of our assertion. Having understood these basic principles, we can now understand that the Gospel here, when saying "Blessed are the poor", really means "Blessed are those who see their state of poverty". Wow, all of a sudden a whole new meaning opens up to our understanding: blessed is the one who understand the precarious state he is in and strives to do something about it. Isn't this the very essence of Orthodoxy?

Why is the clarification in Matthew important and why is the more complete form of this Beatitude the one referred to in our Divine Services? When we say "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" it means "Blessed are those who see their spiritual poverty for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven". How does that compare to "Blessed are the poor (materially) for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven"?

Can we see the difference? Spiritual meanings are always higher. Not that the worldly poverty is not

important towards one's salvation, but it cannot be regarded as more important as the spiritual poverty. Worldly poverty means the death of the body, where spiritual poverty means the death of the soul.

Which one is more important?

