

We hope you enjoy these sample pages. For ordering information, visit Liguori.org.

The Cross AND THE Beatitudes

LESSONS
on
LOVE
and
FORGIVENESS


FULTON J. SHEEN



LIGUORI/TRIUMPH
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Published by Liguori/Triumph
An imprint of Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri
www.liguori.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sheen, Fulton J. (Fulton John), 1895–1979

The Cross and the Beatitudes : lessons on love and forgiveness /
Fulton J. Sheen.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7648-0592-9 (pbk)

1. Jesus Christ—Seven last words—Sermons. 2. Beatitudes—Sermons. 3. Catholic Church—Sermons. 4. Sermons, American. I. Title.
BT456.S44 2000

232.96'35—dc21

99-056416

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorist Congregation, visit *Redemptorists.com*.

Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 / 18 17 16 15 14

Originally published in 1937 by P. J. Kenedy & Sons.
This edition copyright © 2000 by Liguori Publications
This edition published by special arrangement
with the Estate of Fulton J. Sheen.

Contents

FOREWORD 9



CHAPTER ONE

The First Word: The Lesson of Meekness 11



CHAPTER TWO

The Second Word: The Lesson of Mercy 25



CHAPTER THREE

The Third Word: The Lesson of Purity 37



CHAPTER FOUR

The Fourth Word: The Lesson of Poverty 47

CHAPTER FIVE

The Fifth Word: The Lesson of Zeal 59



CHAPTER SIX

The Sixth Word: The Lesson of Peace 71



CHAPTER SEVEN

The Seventh Word: The Lesson of Mourning 81

CHAPTER ONE



The First Word: The Lesson of Meekness

*Blessed are the meek:
for they shall
possess the land.*

*Father, forgive them,
for they know not
what they do.*

ur Blessed Lord began his public life on the Mount of the Beatitudes, by preaching: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.” He finished his public life on the Hill of Calvary by practicing that meekness: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

How different this is from the beatitude of the world! The world blesses not the meek, but the vindictive; it praises not the one who turns the other cheek, but the one who renders evil for evil; it exalts not the humble, but the aggressive. Social and political forces have carried that spirit of violence, struggle for power, and the clenched fist to an extreme the like of which the world before has never seen.

To correct such a warlike attitude of the clenched fist, Our Lord both preached and practiced meekness. He preached it in those memorable words that continue the Beatitudes:

You have heard that it has been said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him also the other: and if a man will contend with you in judgment, and take away your coat, let go your cloak also unto him. And whosoever shall force you one mile, go with him two....You have heard that it has been said: You shall love your neighbor, and hate your

enemy. But I say to you: Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who makes His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and rains upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans do this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens this? Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.

But he not only preached meekness; he *practiced* it. When his own people picked up stones to throw at him, he threw none back in return; when his fellow townsmen brought him to the brow of the hill to cast him over the precipice, he walked through their midst unharmed; when the soldier struck him with a mailed fist, and made the Savior feel by anticipation the clenched fist of Communism he answered meekly: "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil: but if well, why do you strike me?"

When they swore to kill him, he did not use his power to strike dead even a single enemy; and now on the Cross, meekness reaches its peak, when to those who dig into the hands that feed the world, and to those who pierce the feet that shepherd souls, He pleads: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Which is right—the violence of Communism or the meekness of Christ? Violence says meekness is weakness. But that is because it does not understand the meaning of Christian meekness. Meekness is not cowardice; meekness is not an easy-going temperament, sluggish, and hard to arouse; meekness is not a spineless passivity that allows everyone to walk over us. No! Meekness is self-possession. That is why the reward of meekness is possession [of the earth].

A weak person can never be meek, because he is never self-possessed; meekness is the virtue that controls the combative, violent, and pugnacious powers of our nature, and is therefore the best and noblest road to self-realization.

The meek person is not one who refuses to fight, nor someone who will never become angry. A meek person is someone who will never do one thing: he will never fight when his conceit is attacked, but only when a principle is at stake. And there is the keynote to the difference of the anger of the violent and the anger of the meek person.

Communism begins at the moment conceit is attacked; fists clench and rise as soon as the ego is challenged; cheeks flush as soon as self-love is wounded, and blood boils and flows at that split second when pride is humbled.

The anger of the Communist or violent person is based on selfishness; he hates the rich not because he loves the poor in spirit, but because he wants to be rich himself. He is really a capitalist without any cash in his pockets.

Selfishness is the world's greatest sin; that is why the world hates those who hate it, why it is jealous of those who have more; why it is envious of those who do more; why it dislikes those who refuse to flatter, and why it scorns those who tell us the truth about ourselves; its whole life is inspired by the egotistical, the personal, and its wrath is born of that self-love.

Now consider the anger of the meek man. For the meek man, not selfishness but righteousness is his guiding principle. He is so possessed, he never allows his fists to go up for an unholy purpose, or in defense of his pride or vanity, or conceit, or because he wants the wealth of another. Only the principles of God's righteousness arouse a meek person. Moses was meek, but he broke the tablets of stone when he found his people were disobeying God.

Our Lord is Meekness itself, and yet he drove the buyers and sellers from the Temple when they prostituted his Father's House; but when he came to the doves, he was so self-possessed he gently released them from the cages. He is so much master of himself, that he is angry only when holiness is attacked, but never when his Person is attacked. That is why when the Gerasenes beseeched Our Lord to leave their coasts, without a single retort, "entering into a boat, He passed over the water and came into His own city."

That is why when men laughed him to scorn he said nothing but approached the dead daughter of Jairus and went on with his work of mercy, oblivious to their insults,

and restored her to life. That is why he addressed Judas as “friend” when he blistered his lips with a kiss. That is why Our Lord from the Cross prays for the forgiveness of his enemies. Their wrath directed against his Body he would not return, though he might have smitten them all dead by the power of his Divinity. Rather, he forgave them, for “they know not what they do.”

If ever innocence had a right to protest against injustice, it was in the case of Our Lord. And yet he extends pardon. Their insults to his Person, he ignores. Had he not preached meekness? Now must he not practice it?

And how could he practice it better than to pray for those who were crucifying him? And what greater meekness could there be than to excuse them because they knew not what they did. What a lesson for us to remember: that those who do us harm, may, too, be of the same type of misguided consciences as those who crucified Christ.

From that dread day forward, there have been two motives for withdrawing from battle: either because we are afraid or because we are husbanding our energies for a more important battle. The second kind is the meekness of Our Lord. Be not angry, then, when your conceit is attacked. It will do no harm. As Our Lord reminds us: “Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice’s sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”