



BLESSED are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ **Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.** ⁵ Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5:3-12 (KJV))

It might add understanding to append the words, *for my sake* to each of the 'blesseds' above for there are no blessings apart from those granted by a loving Father. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life **for my sake** shall find it.* (Matthew 16:25) It seems remarkable in human reasoning to consider that those who mourn are to be blessed, but is it so. Our Lord mourned over the little faith of Martha and Mary outside the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35), and Martha and Mary also mourned without cause, but were blessed by a wonderful joy at the resurrection of their dear brother. Our Lord also mourned over the city of Jerusalem as He made His last approach there (Matthew 23:37).

The state of mourning relieves the miseries of the soul and assures a better state to follow. It is for this reason that a mother, wife, husband, or father should be given time to mourn the loss of a beloved one for a time following. Sorrow is a rock of misery that remains in the lower chambers of the heart until released through the process of mourning. Silent and lonely, the mourner meditates upon the deeper meaning of life and love. Those considerations come to the surface and will give relief and comfort as God gives us assurance of a future reunion.

The Dark Night of the Soul following the loss of a loved one cannot, and will not, last for more than that one dark night. There comes the morrow when the brilliance of the Sun of Righteousness will burst across the horizon with renewed assurance of the better joy of day. . . . *in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.* (Psalm 30:5)

In the words of Mary Slocum: *'Blessed are they that mourn.'* This seems indeed a strange beatitude. But to those who have learned its meaning it is no longer strange. There are blessings, rich, deep and satisfying, which we can never know until we mourn. You would never see the stars if the sun continued to shine through all twenty four hours. It would be a loss, too, to any one if he were to pass through all the years of his human life and never once behold the night's sky with its brilliant orbs. We can then say, *'Blessed is the hour when the sun goes down and it grows dark; for then we see the glory of Heaven's stars.'*

Can you imagine the joy in the hearts of Martha and Mary when Jesus raised their brother from the grave? Could they have experienced such joy had their brother never died and they had never mourned?

Our Lord's Advent came after a period of four centuries of darkness in Israel. It was a smothering and stifling spiritual darkness that pervaded the land without a single Word from on High. Then, in the fulness of time, God sent a brilliant Light into the world – a blinding light to some, and a Light of truth and mercy to others who believed. Light is always more starkly manifested after a period of darkness. *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.* (Isaiah 9:2) The 'shadow of death' to the believer is only that – a shadow. A shadow has no substance or power. Jesus made clear the state of the dead in Christ: *Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, **Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.*** (John 11:9-11) The Light must be IN us if darkness is in the world. A shadow is merely the absence of light. Death is not real to those who are the Elect and Chosen of God the Father. As Jesus said to the mourner (Martha) outside the tomb of Lazarus: *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* (John 11:25-26)

Now, I know that I often repeat these glorious words of our Lord in my devotions, but do they not merit repeating every day and every moment of the day? Can we consider them too often? I think not. It is the glorious heart of the Gospel. Remember the two main points our Lord is making in the above text:

1. Those who believe in the Lord, even when they physically die, still live on in Christ;
2. Those who believe must do so in this life, while life remains, or there is no salvation in the grave.

When we pass from this life and are buried, we awaken from the sleep of death in the same state in which we lay down our heads in the grave – either to everlasting glory in

Christ, or eternal damnation in the fires of Hell. There is no neutral ground between the two states.

There is a certain sweetness that is inexplicable in the heart of the mourner. Great sorrow pervades our thoughts, but beneath the very sinews of our heart lies a certain comfort that cannot be stated in words. The Holy Spirit gently prompts us with the renewed hope and knowledge that this love we hold for our parted one has not died with the corpse. Love is perhaps the one and only possession over which death has no power. It is the one component of the Christian heart that survives the dark shadow of death: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:35-39)

Take no exception to the term, love of God in considering that does not apply to our loved one, for God is the Author of all love – even that which we bear for those whom we mourn.

A wonderful old servant of God, J.R. Miller, has written a poem describing beauty that can brighten our darkest nights:

*Across my day the shadows creeping
Brought the unwelcome night.
The distant hills, the last gleams keeping
Of dear, familiar light.
Slowly became a darkened wall around, and soon
The world, with all its loved and wonted sights, was gone.*

*Ah, light that made such sweet revealing,
That showed this world so bright,
You gave no hint you were concealing
The greater wealth of night!
For now, above and far beyond the hills, appear
Ten thousand worlds I did no dream before were here.*

It is the contrast between light and darkness that, once parted, makes even the darkness light. Only God can make our mourning a blessing!