

The Beatitudes: Practical & Poetic Reflections

Catherine F. Powers

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Poetry and religion have enjoyed a long marriage in writers from St. John of the Cross and Gerard Manley Hopkins to Louise Gluck and Mark Jarman, as well as midrash writers like Adrienne Rich and Alicia Ostriker. Each writer uses sacred text of the Judeo-Christian tradition as prompt to further explore story and idea.

In *The Beatitudes: Practical & Poetic Reflections*, Catherine F. Powers attempts to make that investigation user-friendly by looking at the beatitudes, a series of eight blessings that begin the Sermon on the Mount, according to the Gospel of Matthew. Powers uses these blessings to begin her introspection. She questions the meaning of the beatitudes first in an interpretive poem and then offers comment on the genesis of thought behind the poem. An even simpler breakdown follows wherein the author quotes the scripture and offers a brief synopsis of both the beatitude's "essence" and the "myth" surrounding the text. She ends with "reflection words," "reflection questions," and a final prayer for the strength to embody the meaning of the blessings.

Powers's multifaceted approach to studying the scripture fits her career choice as a mixed-media artist and poet. Her movement between poetry and prose gives readers multiple ways to enter into the beatitudes and translate them for their own lives. Her poetry tends toward dramatic, abstract visual settings that allow readers great freedom in assigning their own imagery. In "Blessed Are the Peacemakers," she writes:

the land of meeting

over the hillside not yet to the horizon

a land both solid and uncertain

a land both inviting and vast

The Beatitudes: Practical & Poetic Reflections aims to encourage reflection, and it does its job. Powers sets forth her own ideas, but she also provides multiple approaches for others to create their own spin on the famous blessings. She even offers an alternative to the traditional prayer-ending "amen," suggesting the use of "OK" as a less definitive and more cooperative word. She asserts that faith and the understanding of it requires a cooperative effort between the faithful and the higher power, particularly in looking at blessings that have thwarted conventional wisdom for hundreds of years.

Powers ends her book with Matthew 5:6, which states: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." In writing *The Beatitudes: Practical & Poetic Reflections* and offering her own journey of understanding to readers, she enacts the blessing and welcomes others to do the same. "To be righteous," she believes, "one must search diligently to receive conviction."

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (June 7, 2011)

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