



"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."¹

One may speculate why such a person possessing this character will see God. The other beatitudes do not have this same unique promise. The Scripture affirms that indeed these persons shall see God-not may see God, not can see God, but indeed shall see God. The Old Testament repeatedly records that no one shall see God and live, but here our Lord Jesus Christ made an exception. There is something special about this group of people. The pure in heart mimic Christ Jesus in His love, meekness, and speech. They are an image and likeness of Him. All humanity was created in His image and likeness, but because of sin-certainly due to pride foremost-this sanctified image was distorted. Purity of heart is a state of remaining in Christ's image. Those who are pure in heart hold no grudges, no ill will, no evil thoughts against others, and no selfish desires or ambitions. Forgiveness is their language-a genuine speech that is conveyed in actions. There are five relevant characteristics of the authentic language of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not hate, does not keep silent, does not demand revenge, does not have limits, and does not fear.

1. Forgiveness is engulfed in love and love is engulfed in forgiveness.

Love is action and not merely an emotion. "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*"² If one does not love, one cannot forgive. Likewise, if one does not forgive, one cannot love. We see these two concepts together profoundly in Christ's ultimate passion when He uttered, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*"³ Love is the essential dialect of the language of forgiveness.

2. Forgiveness is not silent and is not disingenuous lip service.

The pure in heart do not keep silent, but rather convey their love to others, in words and in actions—not just in words alone. They only keep silent when they are personally accused or attacked and injustice is laid upon them. Even such tribulation was exhibited in the life of Christ as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah, yet the Messiah kept His silence, "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened*

*not His mouth;?He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,?and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,?so He opened not His mouth."*⁴ The pure in heart reveal their love for the brethren with open hearts and clear speech.

3. Forgiveness defines meekness, not revenge.

*"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*⁵ Forgiveness is not a feature of the human intellect because it does not reason or demand rights or compensatory wages for damages. Forgiveness is a perpetual renewal of heart and spirit in spite of one's transgressions and those of others. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God,?and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*⁶ We recite this verse in every opening prayer in the Agpeya.⁷ Thus, all day, we ask for the creation of a new heart and spirit, because throughout the day we experience many spiritual falls and weaknesses. Yet, we cannot wallow in our shortcomings, but trust in God's infinite capacity to help us to rise and recreate and renew our hearts and spirits. These renewed and recreated hearts must be extended to our fellow man that likewise frays along the way, but should not be left desolate without the prospect of forgiveness. This feature should remain as a basic instinct in every

Christian from birth through Baptism until departure to the Paradise of Joy.

4. Forgiveness cannot be measured quantitatively.

If one sins against another, the extent of forgiveness is not only seventy times seven, but seventy to the power of seven, which is infinite.⁸ "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for *"love will cover a multitude of sins."*⁹ It is clear that a multitude has no end. Furthermore, the Lord provides us with a template of conditional forgiveness according to our forgiveness of others' transgressions.¹⁰

5. Forgiveness is the essence of a Christ-centered inner peace.

This is not an ordinary peace but the peace of Christ. Even Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked king who desired to harm the three young men (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) was astonished at their peace and immediately recognized that the "Son of God" walked amongst them in the exceedingly hot furnace: *"I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."*¹¹ They were neither complaining nor even seemingly aware or the least bit anxious of any imminent danger, but

with serenity they were strolling peacefully while in the midst of the furnace. When the king called out to them, they calmly came forth for they were at peace with the King of Peace.

As citizens of heaven here on earth, we must speak the language of forgiveness and live it with all sincerity of heart, mind, and soul. If we learn this language fluently and practice it ardently, we will love more and bring others to the knowledge of Christ by emulating Him. The more we love, the more peace we can bring into the world amidst the hatred, cruelty, and suffering that exists. In addition we will proactively prevent any possible future destructiveness from sprouting and infiltrating our societies and infecting the next generation, emblematic of past wicked empires that have fallen to ruin. Let us strive to be pure in heart, harmoniously speaking the splendid heavenly language of sincere forgiveness, so that by His grace, we too shall see God.

To God is the glory forever. Amen.

Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern
United States