

## **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"**

Br Daniel Benedict Rowlands, O.P.

"No one shall see me and live" (Ex. 33:20). Thus did the Lord speak to Moses. It is indeed true that only the angels and saints enjoy an unimpeded vision of the Holy Trinity: "for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). So, if this beatitude describes heaven, what does it teach us pilgrims? We can make progress by recognising that eternal life does not abruptly begin at death. In that magnificent formula of St Thomas, "faith is the beginning of eternal life".

The all-too-familiar capacity of the human soul for self-centredness is matched by its astonishing capacity for self-forgetfulness. The soul in love with God yearns to lose its own life in order to be filled with the fullness of God (cf. Eph. 3:19). Losing our life for Christ's sake liberates us to partake of the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4); the beatific vision isn't an arbitrary reward for the feat of self-denial. Purity of heart describes the state of a soul rendered capacious enough at the depths of its being to be wholly filled with the divine life. St Paul surely speaks out of this condition when he declares: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).

Purity is so often mentioned in the context of sexual morality, yet for the ancients, the heart was the seat of the rational faculties rather than the physical senses. It is precisely this intellectual dimension of purity that we have uncovered. St Peter implicitly gives voice to it when he relates that God has cleansed the hearts of the gentiles by faith (cf. Acts 15:8). Faith is formally in the intellect: it is the assent of the intellect to the divine truth, at the command of a will cooperating with grace.

A living faith is of course a "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). Through love, we cling to God with our wills, desiring union with Him, as he draws us to himself. We depend on love for this experiential contact, for the infinity of God's being remains beyond the ken of every creature, even the divinised intellects of the blessed. That said, the intellect in its human mode certainly does help purify our faith. Through the light of reason, nourished by Sacred Scripture, Church teaching, and sound spiritual counsel, we learn to identify all those things in our lives which are not God. In so doing, our love is purified, reserved ever more exclusively for the Creator instead of creaturely idols.

Human reasoning, however, is itself one of those things able to distract us by becoming our principal focus, or worse turning our attention to ourselves in the act of knowing. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1). Cleansing by faith can therefore only be perfected by God himself: "if the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour" (Ps. 126:1). It is by the Holy Spirit, and especially the gift of understanding that the heart is lifted up to exalt in the depths of the blessed Trinity, and not in itself. It is through persistent prayer that we must boldly ask for this gift. "Lord, increase our faith" (Lk 17:5). In an instant, more may be disclosed than we can tell (cf. Ps. 39:6), for there is at work in us a power able to accomplish abundantly more than we can imagine (cf. Eph. 3:20). Yet, our preparation to receive such a gift is to patiently wait in darkness, walking by faith, and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

"A pure heart create for me, O God" (Ps. 50:12). Almighty and eternal God, thou who created man on the sixth day, send forth thy creating Spirit and realise the sixth beatitude in us; recreate in us pure hearts, so that the light of thy countenance may penetrate us, and, as our likeness to thee is restored by the vision of thy refulgent glory, that same light may stream out from us for the illumination of the world.