

## Meister Eckhart: The Poor Man

*Beati pauperes spiritu, quia ipsorum est regnum coelorum.*

Ultimate bliss speaking in its wisdom, said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mathew 5,3). All angels, all saints, and all creatures that have been born, must be silent when this eternal wisdom of the Father speaks, because all the wisdom of the angels and all creatures is as pure nothing when compared to the limitless wisdom of God. This wisdom has said that the poor are blessed.

Now, there are two kinds of poverty. The first is an external poverty and it is good and very much to be praised in one who accepts such poverty willingly, out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ, because He, likewise, was poor on earth. I will not speak of this poverty any further. Then, there is yet another poverty, an internal poverty, which underlies each word of our Lord when He says "Blessed are the poor in spirit".

Now I beg you to be likewise so that you can understand his words; for I tell you by the eternal truth: if you are not identical with this truth about which we will now speak you cannot possibly understand me.

Some people have asked me what poverty is in itself, and what a poor man would be. We will now answer them.

Bishop Albert says: "A poor man is a man for whom all things that God ever created are not sufficient", and that is well said. But we say even better and take poverty in a higher way: A poor man is one who wants nothing and knows nothing and has nothing. I will speak on each of these three points and I beg you for the love of God to understand this truth, if you can. However, if you do not understand, do not worry on that account because I am going to speak of a truth such that only a few good people will understand.

First, we say that a poor man is one who wants nothing. Many people fail to understand this statement correctly; they are the ones who cling to their selfish "I" in their spiritual practices and in their external good actions, which they take to be great accomplishments. God have mercy on such people who know so little of the divine truth! These men are called holy on the basis of external appearance, but internally they are asses, because they do not comprehend the deep meaning of the divine truth. To be sure, these men too say that a poor man is one who wants nothing. However, they mean by that that a man should live in such a way that he no longer fulfills his own will in anything, but that he tries to fulfill the very dear will of God. In doing so, these men are good, because they mean well; for that we will praise them. May God in his mercy give them the Kingdom of Heaven. But I say by the divine truth that these men are not poor and are not even like poor men. They are seen to be great only in the eyes of those who do not know any better. But I say that they are asses who understand nothing of the divine

truth. Because of their good intentions may they reach the Kingdom of Heaven; but they know nothing of the poverty about which I will now speak.

If someone were to ask me now what a poor man is who wants nothing, I would answer by saying that as long as a man still somehow has the will to fulfill the very dear will of God, that man does not have the poverty we are talking about; for this man still wills to satisfy God's will, and this is not true poverty. For, if a man has true poverty, then he must be as free of his own will now, as a creature, as he was before he was created. For I am telling you by the eternal truth, as long as you have the will to fulfill God's will and are longing for eternity and for God, you are not truly poor. For only one who wills nothing and desires nothing is a poor man.

When I stood in my original source, I had no God, and I was the origin of my own self. There, I willed and desired nothing, because I was pure being and self knowing, pure enjoyment of the truth. There I willed my self and nothing else; what I willed, I was, and what I was, I willed, and I stood empty of God and all created things. However, as I went out, of my own free will, and received my created being, then I had a God; for before the creatures existed, God was not God; rather, He was that He was. When the creatures came into existence and acquired their created being, then God was not God in Himself but he was God in them.

Now, we say that God, as such, is not the highest aim of creatures. For the smallest creature has as high a rank in being as God has. And, if a fly were to have reason, and, using this reason, were to look for the eternal abyss of divine being from which it came, we would say that God, with all that He as "God" is, could never bring about the fulfillment and the satisfaction sought by this fly. We pray to God that we become empty of "God" and that we comprehend and forever enjoy the truth that prevails there, where the highest angels, the flies and the soul are identical, in that place where I stood and willed what I was, and was what I willed. Thus we say, if a man is to be truly poor in will, he must will and desire as little as he willed and desired before he was created. And it is in this way that a man is poor who wills nothing.

Secondly, he is a poor man who knows nothing. We have said on occasion that a man should live in such a way that he would not live for himself, the truth, or God. Now, however, we say it differently and we say further that a man who is to have this poverty must live so that he does not know that he does not live for himself, the truth, or God. Rather, he must be so free from all that he has learned that he would not know or recognize or feel that God lives in him; even more, he should be empty of all knowing. For, when that man stood in God's eternal essence, nothing else lived in him; what lived there was he himself. For that reason, we say that a man must be as empty of all knowing as he was before he was created and he must let God accomplish His work in him as He wills, and himself stand empty.

All that emanates from God has is in constant activity. The activity assigned to man is to love and to know. Now, there is a controversy over which of these is the primary abode of bliss. Some masters have said it is love; others have said it is both knowledge and love, and they are somewhat nearer the mark. But we say that it is neither knowledge nor love; rather there is a

deep background beyond the mind from which knowledge and love both flow; that background itself neither knows nor loves as the energies of the mind do. He who knows himself to be this background knows bliss. For him, there is no past and no future; nothing can be added to him, for he can neither gain nor lose. Therefore, he is also deprived of the knowledge that God works in him; rather, he enjoys himself in himself in the way that God does.

I say also that a man must stand so rid and empty of everything that he does not know or feel that God acts in him, and only so can that man possess true poverty.

The masters say that God is an intelligent being who knows all things. But I say that God is neither a being, nor an intelligent being, nor one who knows this or that. Hence, God is empty of all things and, moreover, is all things.

Now, whoever is to be poor in spirit must be poor in all his own knowing so that he knows nothing of God, nothing of any created object, and nothing of himself. Hence, it is necessary that this man desire to not know or feel anything of the action of God in him. In this way he can be poor in his own knowing.

Thirdly, a poor man is one who has nothing. Many people have said that to have no material possessions is perfection, and what they say is true if the lack is intentional. But this is not the meaning I have in mind.

I have said first that a poor man is one who does not want to fulfill God's will, who furthermore lives in such a way that he is as empty of his own will and of God's will as he was before he came into existence. We say that this is the highest poverty. We have said secondly that a poor man is one who does not know anything of God's work in him. If one is empty of knowing and feeling in this way, that is a most pure poverty. The third poverty, however, of which I am about to speak is the most supreme; it is the one in which a man has nothing.

Now pay close attention! I have often said and so have great masters, that a man should be so empty of all things and all actions, internal and external, that he could be a proper place for God in which He could work. But now we say otherwise: if a man stands empty of all things, of all creatures, of himself and of God, but God still can find a place in him in which He can work, then we say that man is not poor in the purest sense, as long as that is so. For God is not longing for a man in which there is a place where He can work; on the contrary, a man is truly poor in spirit only if he stands so empty of God and of all His works that, if God willed to work in that man's soul, God Himself should be the very place in which He wants to work; and He would gladly do so. For, if God were to find a man so poor in spirit, He would carry out His own work in such a man, and this man would do no more than welcome God. God Himself being the place for His own work, this man in his poverty reaches the eternal being that he was, is, and always will be.

Saint Paul has said: "All that I am, I am through God's grace". But what we are saying now seems to go beyond grace and beyond being, beyond knowledge, will, and desire. How then can Saint Paul's saying be true? Our answer is that his saying is indeed true. The presence of grace in him was necessary, because it was God's grace working in him that brought what was potential in him to its ultimate fulfillment. When grace ended, having accomplished its work, Paul remained as that which he had always been.

Therefore we say that a man should be so poor that he neither is nor has a place in which God could accomplish his work. If this man still holds such a place within him, then he still clings to duality. I pray to God that he rids me of God; for my essential being is above God insofar as we comprehend God to be the origin of all creatures. In that divine background of which we speak, where God is above all beings and all duality, there I was myself, I willed myself and I knew myself, in order to create my present human form. And therefore I am my own source according to my timeless being, but not according to my becoming which is temporal. Therefore, I am unborn, and, in the same way as I have never been born, I shall never die. What I am according to my birth will die and be annihilated; since it is mortal it must decompose in time. In my eternal birth all things were born and I was the source of myself and of all things; and if I had so willed there would be neither I nor any things; but if I were not, then God would not be, for I am the cause of God's existence; if I were not, God would not be God. However, it is not necessary to know that.

A great master says that there is more nobility in his breakthrough than in his outpouring and that is true. As I flowed out of God all things were saying "God is". But this cannot possibly make me happy because in this I recognize myself as a creature. In my breakthrough, however, wherein I stand empty of my own will, of God, of God's will, and of all His works and of God Himself, there I am above all creatures, I am neither God nor creature, rather I am that I was and will remain, now and forever. There I receive an impetus which carries me above all angels. In this impetus I receive such overwhelming riches that God, with all that he as God is, together with all his divine works, could never fulfill me; for in this breakthrough it is imparted to me that I and God are one. There I am what I was and I neither increase nor decrease, for there I am the motionless cause which makes all things move. Then God no longer finds a place in such a man, for a man with such poverty conquers what he always has been and forever will remain. Then God and the spirit are one, and this is the purest poverty that one can find.

Whoever does not understand what I say should not be disheartened by that. For as long as a man is not one with this truth he will not understand my words. For this truth is not veiled and comes directly from the heart of God.

May God help us to live forever in this truth. Amen.