These reflections were developed by two Secular Franciscans in the Atlantic area of the Regional Fraternity of Eastern Canada, Doug Hagen and Sherrill Guimond. In a shorter form, they were presented at an Area meeting, and then, these texts became the basis for one of the retreats hosted by St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Cornwall, PEI.

We are using the version of the Beatitudes found in Matt 5:1-12.

**Second Beatitude: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

Spiritual poverty recognizes that all we have and all we are is a total gift from God. We are totally dependent on God, a good and loving God, who is in charge of the universe and of our lives. We should not horde what we have been given as gifts. Rather, we should use our talents, intelligence, possessions, and the like to help others.

The first Beatitude, Poor of Spirit, is inseparable from Mourning. Jim Forest reminds us that “without poverty of spirit, I am always on guard to keep what I have for myself, and to keep me for myself” (pg.38). The consequence of “poor in spirit” is becoming sensitive to the pain and losses of people around us. Those who mourn know how little they are without God. In their sorrow, they will be comforted. Their sorrow helps them see the many around them who are much worse off – the poor, the abused, the hungry, the discriminated against, the victims of crime and war and disease and prejudice. Their sorrow can move them to lend a helping hand to those who suffer and be Jesus’ instrument of comfort to them.

Sister Helen Cecilia Swift. In her book, “How Blest You Are”, states that our culture tells us just the opposite of this beatitude: How blessed we are to mourn. She says that “sorrow and sadness are seen as negative emotions – we strive to avoid these negative feelings. If you cannot escape certain events that cause mourning, you can at least try to pretend they did not happen. She mentions how at a funeral we will hear people say things like “how lovely she looks – she looks like she is just sleeping.” She further states that every human life knows times of sadness and trouble. The crucial question is, “how do we handle these times?” (pg. 25-26)

Sr. Swift tells us that the human foundation for the 2nd Beatitude is the recognition of all our emotions. Jesus tells us we must accept all of our emotions as part of our humanity. God made us emotional beings and our feelings can be used to deepen our relationship with him; once we recognize and accept the feelings that are present within us , we then need only to ask Jesus how best to handle them (pg.27).

Jim Forest in his book, “The Ladder of the Beatitudes” uses the metaphor of the ladder to tell us about the second rung of the ladder after “ Blessed are the Poor in Spirit”. It is the sacrament of tears - the Beatitude of feeling and expressing grief not only for my own sorrows and losses but the sorrows and losses of others. You can hardly feel someone else's pain without poverty of spirit (pg. 38).

Carl Jung, the famous psychoanalyst, tells us that much unnecessary suffering is born into our world because people refuse to accept the “legitimate suffering” that comes from being human.

Mourning creates transparency in people. It tells people that we are in pain and that we have experienced some type of loss. It opens us up for others to know. There is the loss of a loved one that causes mourning but there is also the repentant woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, mourning the damage her actions had caused others and herself; there are the tears of Peter when the rooster crowed after his third denial of Christ, mourning for Christ’s suffering and for himself for having been a coward and a liar. There is a great deal in our lives for which we all can only lament, do penance, and seek forgiveness. God grant us the gift of tears (Ladder of the Beatitudes - pg. 41).

Think about that two-word verse in the Gospel of John: "Jesus wept." The 17th-century poet and priest John Donne tells us that "There is no shorter verse in the Bible, nor is there a larger text." The gospel authors tell us of three times when Christ wept: as he stood before the tomb of his friend Lazarus; as he looked on the city of Jerusalem and foresaw its destruction; and as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the day before his crucifixion. In mourning there is transparency—the body shows who you truly are. Christ is a very transparent person, able to communicate with his whole body, not just words. A child is transparent in the same way. Mourning makes us transparent to each other.
The presence of Christ is revealed in those who mourn. Tears are very powerful. No prayer of absolution equals tears. We are mourning with the heart of Christ—mourning our sins and losses.

The second beatitude is “blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted”. Francis was a mourner. He mourned for Christ. Francis saw all of the suffering that Christ went through. Francis was able to identify with Christ’s sorrow and suffering. This persuaded him not only to mourn for Christ but to take it one step further. Francis wanted to be a martyr. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

James C. Howell, in his book, “The Beatitudes for Today”, tells us that “Frances saw the world through tears and his mourning drew him into action” (pg. 97).

Richard Rohr tells us that “Jesus praises the weeping class, those who can enter into solidarity with the pain of the world and not try to extract themselves from it. That is why Jesus says the rich man can’t see the Kingdom. The rich one spends life trying to make tears unnecessary and ultimately, impossible …The weeping allows one to carry the dark side, to bear the pain of the world without looking for perpetrators or victims, but instead recognizing the tragic reality that both sides are caught up in. Tears from God are always for everybody”(Jesus’ Plan for a New World; The Sermon on the Mound, pg. 133).

Richard Rohr, in his book, “Falling Upward’, tells us that “Holy sadness… is the price your soul pays for opening to the new and the unknown in yourself and in the world.” Rohr also tells us that “…Any journey of great love or great suffering makes us go deeper into our faith and eventually into what can only be called universal truth. Love and suffering are finally the same, because those who love deeply are committing themselves to eventual suffering, as we see in Jesus. And those who suffer often become the greatest lovers” (pg.135).

Richard Rohr speaks about how in his working with men, he has found that in many men, there is an inability or refusal to feel their deep sadness and it takes the form of aimless anger. The only way to get to the bottom of their anger is to face the ocean of sadness underneath it … Men are not free to cry, so they transmute their tears into anger …(pg. 135).

The second beatitude touches deeply the reality of death in all its various forms. It addresses all the death forces that undermine health in our lives and world. No other Beatitude expresses more powerfully Isaiah 61:1-3a. This passage depicts the promise, the “year of the Lord’s favor,” which proclaims that the pain of the world one day will be reversed. It seems for every form of mourning there can be a comfort; such is the promise of Isaiah 61.

Fr. Michael Crosby, in his book, “Spirituality of the Beatitudes”, tells us that in “considering this Beatitude that blesses or honors those “who mourn” with “comfort”, it becomes clear that the great stumbling blocks to the consolation that is identified with being “comforted” revolve around the dynamics of denial and biblical “hardness of heart”. Denial keeps the process from moving into some kind of resolution. When we reflect on the 9/11 tragedy, we see a kind of fear-based hardness of heart. The pedophilia cases in the Catholic Church are another example of denial. Until we are able to admit the exact nature of what is wrong, the dynamics of death will control us” (pg. 64-65).

Fr. Crosby also states that “in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus voiced the depth of his hurt when he told his disciples, “My heart is nearly broken with sorrow” (Matthew 26:38). The disciples’ inability to grasp his pain, despite earlier professions of care failed to bring any comfort in his mourning. Comfort would only come in his understanding that he had been faithful to God’s plan by trying to heal a broken world. “My Father, if this cannot pass me by without my drinking it, your will be done!” (Matthew 26:42). By admitting his brokenness and frustration at society’s sluggishness of heart (13:14-15) Jesus could do nothing but mourn over his people. Jesus owned the grief yet felt comfort as he realized that he had remained faithful (pg. 66).

In his extreme distress Jesus turns to his Father. He puts his complete trust in the Father’s will, knowing that the Father will give him the strength to complete his mission. When we know our need of God, the kingdom becomes present in our lives too. Jesus awakened his apostles and said, “Get up, let us be going…” (26:46). Entering into the sorrows of life, we too are strengthened so that we can get up and be on our way to new life.

Fr. Crosby also advises that today Jesus’ spirit in us invites us to grieve, to mourn over the brokenness and alienation within our world.

Fr. Crosby asks us: “When was the last time our concern over globalization was translated into making a stand on behalf of its victims? When were we ready to pay a little more for coffee and other “fruits of the earth and work of human hands” so that those who grow and harvest them might be paid a sustainable living wage?” (pg. 74)

Healing will never come until we first admit the existence of the sins and cultural sins that contribute to our society’s brokenness, and then mourn over them. Blessed are those who admit their mourning; they will be comforted with a new-found power that enables them to be restored to authentic life. If we don’t change, then we will remain controlled. And if we remain controlled in our fears and mourning, we will never experience the hope and comfort of the resurrection of God’s power in us that has been promised. (pg. 78)

Fr. Crosby offers the words of comfort in Isaiah 62:4: “You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married;”

The only thing, Fr. Crosby’s says that will keep us from admitting “the exact nature of our wrongs” will be when we remain in denial about their destructive dynamics for people and our planet (pg. 78).

Richard Rohr says much the same thing: “in this Beatitude, Jesus praises…those who can enter into solidarity with the pain of the world and not try to extract themselves from it.” (Jesus’ Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount, pg. 133)

There is an Arab proverb that states “All sunshine makes a desert”. There are some things that only sorrow can teach.

There is a blessedness in sorrow; there is a blessedness in taking the right way even when the right way is the hard way; there is blessedness in sorrow for the sins and sorrows and sufferings of people around us; and there is blessedness in sorrow which leads to confession before God and the seeking of His forgiveness. And when that forgiveness comes, there is an overwhelming feeling of comfort, trust, encouragement, stimulus and strength.( The Plain Man Looks at the beatitudes, Wm. Barclay, pg. 33)

Ron Rolheiser tells “that suffering and humiliation finds us all, and in full measure, but how we respond to them will determine both the level of our maturity and what kind of person we are. There is no depth of soul without suffering.” (taken from “Our Fundamental Option - a talk given by Rolheiser, May 19, 2013)