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.

**Third Beatitude: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**

St. Francis was truly poor in spirit. He knew his need for God. He made this attitude a basic value of his life. He asked the Holy Spirit to develop this attitude. He made choices based on his awareness of his need for God – his poverty of spirit. He set an example for us as he set his fears and doubts in the hands of Jesus and placed his trust in the care of the Lord.

St. Francis mourned the pain and suffering and death of Jesus. He entered into the life of the poor and the lepers of his time.

As we reflect on the suffering of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, we should consider the unique opportunity the disciples had to be there for the suffering Jesus.

These beatitudes come together in the profound suffering of Jesus in the Garden. He puts His complete trust in the Father’s will, knowing that the Father will give Him the strength to complete His mission.

Jesus knew the people to whom he was preaching. He knew the books of the Bible so he knew how much their ancestors had suffered at the hands of more powerful nations. He knew that they wanted freedom from the oppression of ruthless rulers – Herod, for example. Would He dare to tell them that the meek, not the violent, would in inherit the earth.

Francis too lived in tumultuous times. He knew first hand the results of man’s inhumanity to man. Both Jesus and Francis knew that no matter how radical it sounded, they must pass on the message of the Kingdom of God. The earth would fall to the meek, the gentle-hearted.

To be meek may be to be a person who disciplines himself to be gentle, rather than severe, non-violent rather than violent. Aristotle saw meekness as the virtue that lies between opposing extremes of anger; cold cruelty on the one hand as evidenced by Hitler and his cohorts; for example, and burning wrath on the other. The meek person is neither too hasty nor too slow-tempered. That person bears reproaches and slights, is not bent on revenge, is free from belligerence and bitterness, possesses tranquility and steadiness of spirit. It has been used to describe a person who is aligned with God.

The word, meek, not only rhymes with weak, but for many people it indicates much the same thing. Although its actual meaning has nothing to do with cowardice but with showing patience, humility, gentleness.

Very few people aspire to humility. We say we are proud of our humble beginnings – through perseverance and hard work, we leave poverty behind and achieve things to be proud of.

Abraham was meek – at the command of God, he uprooted and travelled to a land he knew not – Genesis. Psalm 25 says that God “leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his ways.”

The most beautiful example of meekness may be in Mary’s response to the Archangel Gabriel. “Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me as you will.” When we stop to think about it, there is no other act in human history that has had such significance. Through meekness, Mary gave birth to our Savior, nourished Him, cared for Him, raised Him, and became one of his disciples.

Another example of meekness in Scripture is the story of Isaac – a trusting “Yes, Father”, a quiet going along with God’s will. We read in Genesis, Chapter 26, about his absolute trust in God and his non-violent attitude. His meekness led eventually to victory and prosperity.

Where does meekness come in, in our lives? We are with our families, our neighbors, our places of work.

Meekness says – you are not in danger. I will not bully you in any way. This a safe place to be.

A co-worker of mine, a fellow teacher, worked very hard to make his classroom a place where people would feel safe. He ate his lunch in the industrial arts lab and the students particularly those were what we would call “at risk”, soon began to congregate around him at lunchtime. They knew that they were safe and had a wise, discerning person who would listen.

A definition of meekness: a quiet and expectant bearing of destiny that is grounded in God: Jesus, St. Francis, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa.

St. Francis recognized and contemplated the meekness and humility of Christ at Greccio, at the Cross and especially in the Eucharist.

In his meekness, his humility, he was truly aware of the phrase: “The awesomeness of God.” Perhaps the Jews of Jesus’ time were more open to gentleness than we are. They were steeped in Old Testament spirituality. They knew how often meekness had been mentioned in the Psalms. Perhaps they recalled specifically Psalm 37:1-2.

“Do not strive to outdo the evildoers or emulate those who do wrong. For like grass they soon wither, and fade like the green of spring.”

In fact, verse 11 of Psalm 37 says: “But the humble shall possess the land and enjoy untold prosperity.”

We should not make the mistake of thinking that the person of gentle spirit never gets angry. If we look at Mark’s Gospel, Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers who were profaning the House of God. (Mk 11: 15-18).

Luke tells us that he got angry with the Scribes and Pharisees when they misled the people (Luke 11:52). We should note that Jesus got angry with those who oppressed the powerless and the poor, never because he himself was suffering injustice – such as when he stood before Annas.

Meekness is not apathy. Nor is it passivity that accepts injustice. Rather it implies the inner strength to take non-violent action even in the face of great injustice. There is a power in meekness that the violent cannot understand. Even after Jesus’ exampl3e of self-giving we find the Apostles arguing about who is the greatest. Two thousand years later, this spirit of competitiveness is prevalent in the secular business world. This competitiveness spirit and even ruthless aggressiveness seem to be the foundation of success in the business world.

Meekness, however, does not condemn a person to failure, nor does it guarantee success. It is a non-violent way of moving toward a goal, using truly human means that do not harm others – writing letters to government on torture, etc. Jesus leads us to look to the home as the place where meekness is taught and learned. Unfortunately, many homes today are filled with violence. Frustration and stress exist in our society, so it is essential for families to work out ways to relieve stress in a non-violent way.

The gentle cultivate the earth; they do not possess it. They use the resources of the earth sparingly knowing that resources are limited. Our land is symbolic of the kingdom fulfilled. The abundance and variety of living things are reminders of the richness we will share in the future kingdom. The promise of this future kingdom depends on learning from Jesus to be gentle and humble of heart.

Paul tells us: “Things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God.” (1 Cor. 2:9)

We may never be meek in the physical sense of destitution but we can try to separate ourselves from the things of the world and pursue a Godly meekness. Fortunately for us, the Spirit is waiting to give us what we need. When we admit that we are not God (poor in spirit), when we learn to weather hardship with grace (blessed are those who mourn), then we become fertile soil ready to inherit the blessings that the Spirit wants to share – the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are character traits that shape the way we view and interact with the world. These virtues help us to recognize God’s presence (or absence) in the people, places and situations we face each day. They help us to discern and obey God’s will in our lives.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are charity (love), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity. These are gifts of another kind, things that others can sense in us through our actions. The list begins with charity for good reason. In contemporary use, this word is associated with helping the poor but the Church uses it interchangeable with the word LOVE. This puts an altogether different spin on it - not the kind of love that is expressed in movies and popular songs. In Godly terms, the definition of love is a series of actions. Kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness – these attributes direct how we interact with one another, not only those close to us, but co-workers, store clerks, those we meet casually. Self-control is the key to resisting temptation. Modesty and Chastity ensure that we treat the temple of the human body with dignity. Chastity refers to much more than what we consider to be “sins of the flesh”, but we don’t have time to go into that right now. Peace and patience come from within. I am sure we all know people who embody these qualities. Their faith seems to permeate the world around them. They don’t have to hold up a Bible or shake a fist; their very presence is evangelization. We can learn from them. Better yet, we can be them. When we go to the store, how will the clerk remember us? Remembering the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit can help us embody a Christ-like meekness every day.

A Portrait of the Meek: They trust in God. Biblical meekness is rooted in the deep confidence that God is for you, not against you.

They commit their way to God. They admit that they are insufficient to competently cope with the complexities and obstacles of life and they trust that God is able and willing to sustain, guide and protect them.

They are quiet before God and wait for him. This doesn’t mean that they become lazy. It simply means that they are free of frenzy. Meek people have a quiet steadiness about their lives in the midst of upheaval.

They don’t fret over the wicked. I ask you to look at Psalm 37, vs. 3-11. Meekness has very much to do with God. It consists of a peaceful freedom from fretful anger. It is based on trust in God.

Characteristics:

1. Meekness is what St. Paul calls “a fruit of the Spirit”, given to us by God when we surrender ourselves totally and completely to Him.
2. Meekness is humility.
3. Meekness is to be thoughtful of others. The thoughtful person is always courteous and considerate of others and their needs. He never inflicts a needless wound. He always tries to lighten the burdens of others.