



In the Gospel of Matthew (6:2), Jesus warns us with a phrase that, though brief, contains immense theological and spiritual depth: *“Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”* These words, spoken during the Sermon on the Mount, invite us to reflect on the intention behind our actions, especially when it comes to practicing virtue and seeking holiness. In a world where social media and the culture of “likes” have transformed how we relate to others and ourselves, this teaching of Christ takes on a strikingly contemporary relevance.

The Origin and Historical Context of Jesus’ Warning

To fully grasp the meaning of this phrase, it is essential to situate ourselves in the historical and cultural context in which Jesus spoke it. In first-century Palestine, the Jewish religion was deeply marked by pious practices such as almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. However, these practices, which in themselves were good and necessary, risked being distorted by the pursuit of human recognition. The Pharisees, for example, were known for flaunting their religiosity, seeking the admiration of others more than the glory of God.

Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, identifies this danger and warns us: *“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full”* (Matthew 6:2). In other words, if our motivation for doing good is to receive applause from others, that applause will be our only reward. There will be no merit before God because our intention was not directed toward Him but toward ourselves.

Human Reward vs. Divine Reward

This passage introduces us to a crucial distinction in the spiritual life: the difference between human reward and divine reward. Human reward is fleeting, superficial, and ultimately unsatisfying. It is the “like” on social media, the compliment from a friend, or public recognition. It is something that, while it may give us momentary satisfaction, does not fill the heart or bring us closer to God.

Divine reward, on the other hand, is eternal and transformative. It is the grace of God, inner peace, and the joy that comes from knowing we are doing His will. It is the promise of eternal life, which cannot be compared to any human recognition. As Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward”* (Colossians 3:23-24).



The Danger of Vanity in the Spiritual Life

One of the greatest dangers in the spiritual life is vanity, that subtle but powerful desire to be recognized, admired, and praised. Vanity can infiltrate even our holiest actions, turning prayer, fasting, and almsgiving into acts of self-promotion. This is why Jesus calls us to practice these virtues in secret: *“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”* (Matthew 6:3).

Saint John of the Cross, the great mystic and Doctor of the Church, spoke of the “dark night of the soul,” a process of purification in which the believer must detach from all attachments, including the attachment to spiritual consolations and human recognition. Only in the darkness of faith can we truly encounter God.

An Illustrative Anecdote: Saint Francis of Assisi and the Leper

The story is told that Saint Francis of Assisi, in his youth, felt a deep repulsion toward lepers. One day, while riding near Assisi, he encountered a leper. Instead of fleeing, as he would have done in the past, Francis dismounted his horse, embraced the leper, and gave him alms. At that moment, he experienced a profound inner transformation. Later, he would say that what once seemed bitter to him (contact with lepers) had become sweet.

This anecdote perfectly illustrates the spirit of Jesus’ teaching. Francis did not seek the recognition of others; in fact, it is likely that no one saw him at that moment. His action was motivated by love for God and neighbor, and it was precisely in that authenticity that he found his reward: the grace of conversion.

The Contemporary Relevance of This Teaching

In our digital age, where public image and external validation have become an obsession for many, Jesus’ warning is more pertinent than ever. How often do we post our good deeds on social media, hoping others will see and applaud us? How often do we care more about the appearance of holiness than holiness itself?

Jesus invites us to live authentically, to seek the reward that comes from God and not from men. This does not mean we should hide our good deeds, but rather that we must examine our intentions. Are we doing this out of love for God and neighbor, or out of love for ourselves?



Conclusion: Authenticity as the Path to Holiness

The phrase *“Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full”* is a call to authenticity in our spiritual lives. It challenges us to examine our intentions, purify our motives, and always seek the glory of God above our own. In a world that constantly urges us to seek external validation, this teaching reminds us that the only reward that truly matters is the one that comes from God.

May this reflection inspire us to live with greater authenticity, to practice virtues not for what they can give us in this life but for the love we have for God and neighbor. As Saint Augustine says: *“Love, and do what you will.”* Because when we truly love, our actions no longer seek human reward but become a reflection of God’s love in the world.

This article seeks not only to educate but also to inspire a deeper and more authentic spiritual life. In a world full of noise and distractions, the voice of Jesus continues to resonate with clarity: *“Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”* May these words guide us on our path to holiness.