



Beatitudes on Film:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God

Let (it) go, let God

Frances Murphy

Our series on children's films wouldn't be complete without the highest-grossing animation of all time – if you haven't seen *Frozen*, where have you been?! Frances Murphy thinks that Anna and Elsa's story illustrates our next Beatitude on Film and is also the perfect tool to introduce its captive young audience to Ignatian discernment.

This is not the only Beatitude to have its wisdom somewhat clouded with uncertainty regarding its target audience: who, exactly, are the 'pure in heart'? It is relatively easy for us to identify those who mourn or those who are persecuted, even if we do not encounter them regularly; but we might not recognise as quickly those who are poor in spirit, for example, or those with pure hearts. These latter descriptions seem to point towards something deep within a person, rather than a trait which translates obviously into words or deeds.

Purity of heart might suggest a person who is not stained by sin, someone saintly – at least according to that childlike understanding of sanctity which holds up the saints as models of perfection. As children, putting saints on such a pedestal can give us something to aspire to; if we did that as adults, it would be disheartening to see just how far short of the pedestal we are. As our faith matures, we come to understand that holiness depends on our ability to recognise ourselves as sinners, rather than on being free from sin. So purity in heart must be about something else. It might be another childish temptation to take the word 'heart' and make it all about romance or even sexuality. But the gospels aren't known for their proscriptions on sexual ethics, so this doesn't seem to be a likely contender, either.



So who are these people who are so blessed that they shall 'see God' (more on this promise later)? I turn to Fr Gerry O'Mahony SJ, who wrote in an [article](#) for this journal: 'This Beatitude is not particularly about the virtue of chastity, but more about singleness of purpose and desire.' This is a helpful way to start a conversation about this Beatitude with children, who tend to like talking about what they want! Encouraging children to engage deeply with their desires and the behaviour that is informed by them might help them to see, in ways they have not yet recognised, how they are in relationship with God. 2013's *Frozen* can be a springboard for such a discussion – not least because I suspect you will struggle to find a child who has not seen it (and does not own the DVD, the dress, the cuddly snowman...) – because it gives children a physical demonstration of the importance of discovering your heart's true desire and being led by it.

If you have managed to avoid the *Frozen* phenomenon, here's what you need to know. Princess Elsa has been afflicted since infancy with the power to freeze things around her, a power that she struggles to control. When she accidentally directs a shot of ice at her younger sister Anna's head during a childhood game, Anna is seriously injured but is healed by a troll. From then on, the sisters are kept apart in order

to prevent a repeat incident, to the confusion of Anna, who has no knowledge or memory of Elsa's power. In later years, Elsa comes out of her seclusion to be crowned Queen of Arendelle; but when agitated by Anna's announcement of her engagement to the too-good-to-be-true Prince Hans, Elsa loses control of her powers and brings an eternal winter upon the kingdom, from which she then flees. Anna pursues her and in an ensuing struggle the childhood accident is repeated – only this time it is Anna's heart that is frozen, seemingly fatally. 'Only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart', we are told: is this act a kiss from the scheming Prince Hans, or from Anna's new companion, Kristoff? No, it is Anna's own decision to throw herself in the way of Hans's attempt to kill Elsa. Anna's heart is thawed by her true love for her sister.

The troll who heals the young Anna tells her parents that she can be saved because, 'The heart is not so easily changed; the head can be persuaded.' This gives us a way in, early on, to talking about the Beatitude. The troll's words speak to the difference between the fluctuating activity of our minds and the conviction of our hearts – although that is not to say that what happens in our heads doesn't matter. In fact it can be very useful, even essential, in helping us to discover and make sense of our heartfelt desires. According to St Ignatius, our deepest desire, properly understood, is for union with God, and so we need to pay careful attention to how our thoughts and feelings are helping us fulfil this desire – or not. This is known, in Ignatian terms, as discernment.

Ignatius formulated his rules for discernment in order to help us recognise the workings in our lives of the 'good spirit', which leads us ever closer to God, and the 'bad spirit', which pulls us away. That isn't always easy to do: it isn't as simple as, 'the good spirit will make me feel good and the bad spirit will make me feel bad'; sometimes the opposite might be true. If the good spirit is trying to make me aware that some feeling or course of action is leading me away from God, the working of the spirit might not feel particularly 'good'; equally, the bad spirit might try to lead me away from God by tempting me with all kinds of wonderful ideas that, no matter how appealing they might seem, are 'bad'.

It can be particularly difficult for us to recognise the movements of the spirits amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life. Back to those (surprisingly Ignatian!) trolls again, who tell us that, 'People make bad choices when they're mad or scared or stressed.' Such afflictions can distract us, cloud our judgement of what is going on in our minds and hearts, and make it even more difficult to tell whether the good spirit or the bad spirit is in control; when we don't have clarity about our own thoughts and feelings, it is harder to see the way to God. It can be the work of a lifetime to cultivate the habits which allow us to identify the movements of the good or bad spirits, but what is important is that we try always to orient ourselves to God, to love – that we follow our deepest desire.

The film demonstrates both the danger of a lack of discernment and the reward of pursuing a pure and carefully considered desire. It will be Anna who demonstrates the latter, but Elsa's misguided actions along the way highlight the hazards of not paying careful attention to the longings of the heart. 'I can't be free! No escape from the storm inside of me,' she says when she realises the futility of her escape. She planned to improve the lives of everyone in Arendelle by leaving the kingdom, but she failed. Her rash decision to escape was based on bad judgement and an instinct to flee, rather than a careful consideration of her deep desire to do what is best for the kingdom. The 'storm' within her is a sign that this desire persists and that she needs to pay attention to it. Perhaps this is an illustration of a movement of the good spirit that doesn't feel so 'good'. According to [that song](#), Elsa thinks that the solution to her problems is to 'conceal, don't feel', when really it is to be more attentive to her feelings.

Anna, on the other hand, is an example of someone who moves ever closer to her truest desire – reunion with her sister – thanks to careful consideration of what happens in her life. When her heart is pure and she is in touch with her desire, she recognises that popularity, romance and an easy life are false pleasures when compared to the true joy of love for her sister: she is able to discern the trappings of the bad spirit, and so she sets off on her quest to save Elsa. It is only when Anna's heart, a physical symbol of her love, is

literally frozen that she makes mistakes. She becomes vulnerable to superficial suggestions of 'love' because she has lost touch with her singular desire for relationship with her sister. But when it comes to it, Anna's true love for her sister saves her own life, and with it the whole kingdom. In response to Anna's actions, Elsa is able to recognise that it is love that will thaw and save the kingdom, because it is love, not detachment from it, that helps her to control her powers.

Purity in heart, then, might look something like clarity of desire for love in its highest form, which is of course God. Such purpose of desire comes from an ability to identify the forces, both within and without ourselves, that propel us towards its fulfilment and those that pull us back. The purer our hearts, the clearer will be the path to God. If we think of it like that, the reward promised by this Beatitude becomes almost obvious: of course the pure in heart will see God, they will see God everywhere, in all things, because they are always heading closer to Him. Being able to identify and resist the many ways in which the bad spirit tries to turn us away from God or lead us in other directions, is the best way to make sure that we

always stay on the right path, the path of and to love, that will lead us to God.

This can be difficult for any of us to practise, so how can we nurture this orientation to God in children? Perhaps we can encourage them to take stock of the thoughts and feelings they have when they know they have treated someone badly, then in the future they can interpret these same stirrings as warning signs that they have strayed from the path to God. And in the same way, when they do something for the single reason that it will be good for someone else, help them to savour their own reaction to their good deed; that same feeling can serve as an indicator that they are heading in the right direction.

Desire for God is a gift, a gift we have all received from God Himself who wants us to love and praise Him with our lives. He has set our heart's compass towards Him; our task is to learn how to read it.

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