

**As you celebrate the New Year,
May your future be as bright as
the promises of God!**

新年快樂

Happy New Year

It is natural for people to wish one another happiness in a new year.

The Chinese also celebrate Chinese New Year in January 2017. To the Chinese, there are many common idioms to use to extend good wishes to people we meet:

祝你 Wishing you : 一元复始，一帆风顺 二龙腾飞，三羊开泰
四季平安，四海增辉 五福临门，百业俱兴 六六大顺，合家欢乐
七星高照，八方来财 八方和协，九九同心 。。。

The Chinese are very creative in the ways they devise their auspicious words of greetings. Indeed, there are hundreds of such idioms, some with superstition undertones.



Not all the greetings (even if non-superstitious) are always appropriate. It is good to understand what we mean when we extend a greeting, instead of just spouting out the common idioms mechanically. For example, when we greet others 心想事成 (which means “May all your wishes come true”), we must be aware that people are naturally sinners with inappropriate thoughts from time to time. If someone I greet happens to covet the wealth of others and wish bad of his wealthy rivals, then do I say to him 恭喜发财，心想事成 (“May you be prosperous, have all your wishes come true!”) and become unwitting “abettor” of his iniquitous thoughts?

Some people may think that the common New Year greetings are just pleasantries and we don't have to be fastidious about having to understand what the words out of our mouths actually mean. Nevertheless, if someone greets me with a simple 新年快乐 (Happy New Year) knowingly, I would receive the words gladly as a simple wish for happiness. Who doesn't like to be wished to enjoy happiness? If someone instead tries a greeting that is mechanically articulated without understanding, saying to me 祝你新年里双龙戏珠，中华腾

飞，鹏程万里， I would be fascinated by the greeter's effort and at the same time amused by the greeting's irrelevance to me. ☺

I believe that recipients of greetings usually don't take offence for greetings that are well-intentioned even if inapt. So, greeters who realise having said something not quite apropos can just humorously laugh the matter off and not worry too much. There is always room for learning for all of us to pick up a repertoire of greetings that we understand and are appropriate for different categories of people – ordinary acquaintances, close friends, colleagues, students, elders, individuals with a different religious persuasion, etc. – to warm the relationships.



福 is a very familiar character in CNY greetings. It means “Blessing”. One of the auspicious greetings with this character is 五福临门: “May the 5 blessings be upon this home!”

It is not surprising if you see this saying posted on the doors or walls of Chinese homes. Not every Chinese who is able to express this greeting knows what the 5 blessings are. These 5 blessings refer to longevity, wealth, health, virtue and a natural peaceful end to one's life.

The blessing of wealth means the blessing of 财 in Chinese, and is understood to be referring to material riches. 恭喜发财 (*Kong Hee Fatt Choy*)!

When we wish people *Kong Hee Fatt Choy* or 五福临门 (*5 blessings be upon your home*), the wish for material prosperity is inherent.

While 五福临门 contains 5 blessings, Chinese Christians celebrating CNY can perhaps wish one another with a modified auspicious wish for 8 blessings: 祝你

一元复始八^福临门!



In the modified greeting, I have inverted the 福 and raised it slightly higher to signify that it does not refer to the 5 traditional blessings favoured by the Chinese but refers to the 8 supreme blessedness (the Beatitudes – Matt. 5:3-12) descending from above into every home. Whether you celebrate a New Year based on one calendar or another, I send you my best 8 wishes based on the Beatitudes.

As a new year begins:


1. May the supreme blessedness of the kingdom of heaven be upon the poor in spirit!

This is not a castigation of those who are wealthy. Having money is not wrong. However, there is a difference between having money (which is necessary) and coveting it (1 Tim. 6:10). Rich people can also enter the Kingdom of Heaven but, if they are focussed on wishing for a lot of material wealth, it is easy for them to neglect their spiritual health to the point that it becomes difficult for them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matt. 19:24). The wealthy who are greedy may end up spending much of their time monitoring and worrying over their excessive investments and end up losing their wealth and becoming poor.



The materially poor by human comparisons may not necessarily be Godly too, if in their hearts they covet a lot of bad things. Therefore, “poor in spirit” is a quality to be sought by everyone irrespective of their prosperity or poverty. One who is poor in spirit is utterly aware of his inability to meet the high demands of the law to merit salvation, and that he is utterly dependent on Christ for salvation. The salvation is God’s free gift. Receiving this gracious gift of eternal life with honest gratitude and humility, we become impelled in our heart to respond to God’s mercy with love for one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34-35).

Contrast the poor in spirit with those who feel that they are “rich in spirit” like the Pharisee who “stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector!'" (Luke 18:11 NLT)

The Pharisee disparaged everyone else as sinners but not himself, particularly with the emphatic pointing finger – “**even**  like that tax collector!”

“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'" – Luke 18:13

I need say nothing more about who is poor in spirit – someone like the tax collector who felt inadequate or someone like the Pharisee who was full of himself.

2. May the supreme blessedness of being comforted be upon those who mourn!

Ordinarily, we think of mourning as associated with a bereavement. However, mourning is not always ordinary. Take for example the time when Israel was facing a crisis of faith. It was indeed a time of mourning, a time of great pain for many in Zion! Yet, in mourning, the servant of God was still anointed to preach good news to the humble, to comfort those who mourn, to give them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment for the spirit of heaviness. (Isaiah 61:1-3) In brief, even during an exilic time of great distress, God was never far.



When people find themselves in grief by any natural or unnatural cause of great loss, they must not lose cognizance of the comforting hope of restoration in the Lord, “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’” (Rev. 7:17)

Nobody likes to anticipate facing up to a time of mourning even though exultations and miseries are commonly unavoidable seasons of life. In the former season of jubilation, it is easy for people to encounter a real loss of God and His blessings, even if they don’t feel this real loss immediately because they are losing their pleasure-loving selves to light-heartedness. The time of mourning is a time when we are unavoidably confronted with the serious issues of life – not only grieving over a loss but also grappling with the reality of human fragility and the evils in the world.

The Message Bible says, “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.”

3. May the supreme blessedness of inheriting the earth be upon the meek!

Meekness carries the virtuous qualities of placidity, self-effacement, patience and long-suffering. It is not embedded with the undesirable qualities of cowardice, diffidence, shyness and faintheartedness. Understanding the true virtuous qualities should dispel the myth that the meek are spineless to be despised, bullied, intimidated or subjugated by the impertinent aggressors and oppressors.



There is a hymn by Charles Wesley that has this starting verse: “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild; Look upon a little child; Pity my simplicity; Suffer me to come to Thee.”

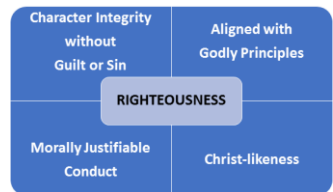
We come to Jesus as children of God, and look to Jesus, meek and mild, as our example of one with a tender, caring spirit and a strength of moral character that surpasses the ordinary. In writing to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul appealed to them “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:1) but he made no bones about the fact that he had the courage of his convictions in battling the world with divine power to demolish strongholds of evil.

With meekness, “if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.” (Gal. 6:1) With meekness, you as the Lord’s servant is not quarrelsome but kind to everyone without being resentful. (2 Tim. 2:24-25) With meekness, you are obedient to rulers and authorities, “ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.” (Titus 3:1-2)

Blessed indeed are the meek who will inherit the land, and they also deserve to “enjoy peace and prosperity” (Ps. 37:11) this CNY and beyond. This is contrasted with the wicked who “will be no more” after a little while. (Ps. 37:10)

4. May the supreme blessedness of being filled be upon those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!

When you are literally hungry and thirsty, your desire to fill your stomach and quench the dryness of your mouth must be intense. Where will be your source of food and water?



Similarly, you who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness in a metaphorical sense must be passionately longing for righteousness. Where will be your source for the satisfying of your hunger and the quenching of your thirst for the righteousness? We can draw an answer from the Psalmist’s cries:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” – Ps. 42:1,3

God is whom we go to for our needs. The righteousness to hunger and thirst after is not “the righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.” (Philippians 3:9) It is not attainable by mere human endeavour. Seek and you will be given. (Matt. 6:33)

Hence, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness “will be filled” (Matt. 5:6), which means that God will fill them. It is a great blessing to be justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:24)

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... to be continued

(In the next issue of The Vine, I shall talk about the other 4 supreme blessedness.)
