

Cycle C Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 JER 17:5-8

Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth. Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.

Responsorial Psalm PS 1:1-2, 3, 4 AND 6

R. (40:5a) Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on his law day and night.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Not so the wicked, not so; they are like chaff which the wind drives away. For the LORD watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Reading 2 1 COR 15:12, 16-20

Brothers and sisters: If Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Gospel LK 6:17, 20-26

Jesus came down with the twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground with a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.”

The Scriptures today are filled with striking contrasts of blessings and curses. They are written in the Wisdom tradition to encourage us to choose the way that guarantees true joy and eternal life. They tell us that God loves us so much that He fills us with blessings when we trust in Jesus our Lord.

Someone once said: *"I've been poor, and I've been rich. Believe me, rich is better."* I doubt there are many of us here who would argue with that. Probably not many of the disciples in today's Gospel would have argued with this statement either. Jesus saw something unique in His "crowd of disciples." Most likely weren't hurting, they had no need of a cure, somehow they could afford to travel, they had no hesitation to follow Jesus...and He knew they had something to learn. These disciples were not the poor people desperate for their next piece of bread...no, they were not like the larger crowd standing nearby who were in need of everything!

Compare the disciples to the author of the first reading. Jeremiah suffered terribly for trusting God alone. You may know his story: Jeremiah was called by God to challenge his own people, especially the leadership, to return to God's way of doing things. Jeremiah was denounced as a traitor and a public enemy! He was tortured, imprisoned, chased out of town and ended up in Egypt. Then a hit squad, sent by his own compatriots, found him there and killed him. No wonder Jeremiah is compared, during Holy Week, with Jesus himself. Both Jeremiah and Jesus could be taunted with: 'He trusted in God. Now let God come and save him.'

So who are blessed and who are cursed? What is the way that guarantees true joy and eternal life?

Leading up to today's Gospel, Jesus spent the night on a mountain in prayer, He then chose His 12 apostles, came down with them from the hills, and standing on level ground among His disciples, He delivered the extraordinary Sermon on the Plain to literally level the field of have and have-nots.

Jesus said to his disciples: “*Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, weeping, insulted.*” They must have been stunned; this teaching was not expected. The Disciples weren’t cursed as the poor, hungry, weeping or insulted were. And they must have been concerned when Jesus compared them unfavorably with the larger crowd of sick and poor nearby who were crying out for help.

I have to tell you, I am concerned that when we heard these beatitudes, we were not as shocked, as stunned as the disciples were. Maybe it’s because we have heard them so many times over the years...or maybe we are just too comfortable in our lives to react...or maybe, like the disciples, we have something to learn. Jesus is telling us, challenging us, that the very values that we hold so dear, wealth, security, health, ‘that rich is better’...everything that we strive so hard to achieve for ourselves and our family...are NOT of the utmost importance when it comes to the values of the Kingdom of God. How could this be?

The heart of the teaching is NOT that the poverty, starvation, sorrow or rejection determine our reward...we can’t earn it. No, the Beatitudes make sense only to those who through our faith in Jesus have learned we can’t do it alone...there is no such thing as a self-made man...we need to live a life of love prompted by the Holy Spirit. When we do something, like walking humbly, and taking care of the poor, the orphan, the widow, the alien...it is because we have recognized that we are dependent upon God...and only then can true joy and peace ensue. When we get prosperous, self-seeking, independent, and disregard the marginalized as parasites, then trouble ensues. This is why we who receive the woes are in danger. We are tempted to rely on our false sense of independence and security. It is difficult, if not impossible, to hold on to any sense of dependence upon God when you feel rich, consoled, filled and popular. Dependence upon God is ignored or seen as a sign of weakness...for some it seems like nonsense.

A friend of mine said, “well then, why didn’t Jesus just say that?” I think its because He had to shock us out of our complacency and call us to stand with the poor and hungry. Here’s the secret: when we learn to “*do whatever He tells us,*” the poor will minister to US.

So who are blessed and who are cursed?

There is a choice, according to Jeremiah: to seek happiness through our own human resources, or seek it in God. To trust in ourselves ends in an arid, spiritual wilderness. To trust in God secures salvation. A person who trusts himself first and foremost wraps himself in a false security of health, wealth and worldly wisdom. A disciple of God, like Jeremiah, may appear to be a fool to some, but he is ultimately blessed by God. And Jesus trusted in the will of the Father that turned the curse of death on a cross into the blessing of resurrection and eternal life. Only God can do that!

So, now we have come to the crux of the matter. The point is that we are joined to Christ through our faith and Baptism. We don't merely believe that in Baptism we have died to sin and are raised to a new and transformed life...no, we experience death and resurrection over and over in our lives. But, it's not life that teaches us...it is God. Christ takes us where we don't expect...sometimes where we don't want to go. But, He always stands with us... and He demands a great deal from us...but when we trust, miracles happen. He calls us to give up our cozy attachments...to do something for others...do something more than just charity...to stand where He stands...next to the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the persecuted and the marginalized! He calls us to live for others and not for ourselves. He calls, we trust, and then He fills us with His blessings. This is radical, this is shocking...because this is our Christian faith! It requires strength. But it's not our own strength, no...it requires strength from heaven.

So who are blessed and who are cursed? The Psalms today answered this way, "*Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.*" God loves us so much that He fills us with blessings when we trust in Jesus our Lord...it's that simple...it's that hard!

I've been poor and I've been rich...believe me, rich isn't everything it's cracked up to be!

And the Church says, Amen!