

14 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time      Year C      February 17, 2019  
Jeremiah 17:5-8    Psalm 1      1Corinthians 15:12,16-20    Luke 6:17,20-28

As we listen to the Beatitudes read during the liturgy we can easily miss their meaning. The message they contain may take a lifetime to learn, but unless we take them to heart there will be no entry into the kingdom of heaven. They explain how to spend this life in order to attain everlasting happiness in heaven. Following Christ is not meant to be easy and it is a challenge we must face every day.

We are invited to do things that do not come naturally to us like being humble, showing mercy and opening our hearts to those in need. As we face the task of developing a proper relationship with God, we are frightened by the deep demands which the beatitudes make on us. We are called not to worship wealth, food or comfort, but to worship the God who alone can grant us all good things. God wants us to be happy. Embracing God and following His way of life is the only way to be blessed, to be truly happy.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus invites the people to take unto themselves to live a new set of values, values that are a contradiction to many of the values offered by the world. In each of these values we find a blessing and the opposite, a woe. Beatitudes are not commandments, nor are they even advice. *They are declarations.* A beatitude *does not* call down God's blessings on a person. It *declares* that the person *is already blest* in the eyes of God because of what the beatitude praises him or her for *being or doing*. The beatitudes describe the nature of the person's virtue he or she already have.

In the first blessing, Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God." Jesus is speaking of the humble who depend on God for help. They recognize that everything they have comes from God. They know their need for God. The poor or the humble are blessed because they place their hope in God. Only God can satisfy the longings of their hearts.

The opposite of the blessing is: "But woe to you who are rich." Jesus is pointing out the danger of riches. The rich place their hope in riches. These are the many people who have no interest in the Kingdom of God, and whose interest in life is in acquiring wealth and pleasures. They build their kingdom in this world. These people will not find happiness in material wealth.

Many years ago, I received a phone call from a man who I knew was one of the richest men in Vancouver. At his bedside, he shared that he was dying. He told me that he spent over \$250,000 to find a cure but nothing worked. He said all his life he sought material wealth and had no interest in God. Now that he was dying he realized all his wealth did not bring him happiness and health. He asked me to hear his Confession, to receive Holy Communion and prepare him to die so he could meet God.

We must never let the material things of the world keep us from God. We may acquire and use earthly goods, but we must acquire and use them justly, charitably, and reasonably. Earthly material things are to be used to build up the Kingdom of God. There are many saintly wealthy people that use their wealth to build up the Kingdom of God. Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

In the second blessing Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled." Jesus is not saying that physical hunger is a good thing. Hunger is a great evil, and its effects are shocking as we listen to the stories of the starving people in Africa, Iran and many other Third World countries, and even here in our own community. When Jesus met hungry people, He fed them.

The poor who are hungry in this life for Christ's sake will have their fill in the eternal kingdom. Our deepest hunger of all is our hunger for eternal life. Only God can satisfy the hunger of the human heart and the human spirit. In Christ, God provides us with the bread of eternal life. It was for this very reason that Christ came down from heaven. He gives us this bread abundantly in the Holy Eucharist. This is the bread that will satisfy our hunger.

And the opposite of this blessing is: "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry." Those who fill their hunger with the material riches of the world will be hungry in the next world.

In the third blessing Jesus says, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." Jesus is not saying that sorrow is a good thing. He has compassion on the sorrowing and He healed many who were suffering. The value of suffering does not lie in the pain of it, but in what the sufferer makes of it. The soul is purified, and the person is transformed through suffering.

A person can find meaning in suffering by seeing it as an opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ. It is through suffering that Jesus redeems the world. If we suffer with Christ on earth we will be crowned with Him in heaven. A person who links his or her suffering to that of Christ becomes a source of great blessing for the entire community.

And the opposite of this blessing is: "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep." The sorrow of this life borne for Christ will be turned into laughter in the eternal kingdom.

Finally, Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people hate you." Jesus is not saying that it is a good thing to be spoken ill of. Abuse and false allegations are very difficult things to deal with. They have been known to destroy people.

This blessing is addressed to those who are suffering and persecuted who choose to follow Jesus. Why are the persecuted blessed? They are blessed because they know their cause is right. They are blessed because God is on their side. They are blest because they are following in the footsteps of Jesus. When the disciples suffer because of Christ, they should rejoice because of the reward that their suffering is already earning for them. The prophets before them suffered, too, because they spoke of God.

In the opposite of the blessings, "Woe to you when all speak well of you," Jesus is pointing out the danger for a disciple seeking popularity. Jesus says that the disciples will not get applause when they speak of Him, but rather persecution. In this woe, the false prophets of the Old Testament preached what pleased men, and *not* what pleased God. They have ceased to be disciples. If we speak about pleases God we will be faced with hostility and opposition.

These beatitudes are personally important to all of us. We can be very much like the people sitting there on the grassy slopes listening to Jesus when we hear the Beatitudes today. We need to heed the message of Jesus to the people and not let our material concerns overshadow our spiritual needs. If we can listen to the Beatitudes with our hearts focused on the message of the blessings and love that Jesus has for each one of us, we will find the blessings and love acting within our hearts, within our family and within our community.