

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-C

February 17, 2019

First Reading – Jeremiah 17:5-8

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 1

Second Reading – 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Gospel – Luke 6:17, 20-26

First Reading: Jeremiah 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

Response: 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

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 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 first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

ALELUIA

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Rejoice and be glad;
your reward will be great in heaven.**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL: LUKE 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.”

REFLECTION

My dear people of God: Please allow me to start our reflection with our Responsorial Psalm which beautifully goes this way: *“Blessed are they who hope in the Lord”*. The verses/stanzas of our Psalm (which is actually the very first in the Bible-Psalm 1) talk about a blessing on those who *“delight in Yahweh’s law”*(verse 1) . . . such people *“will be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither. Whatever he does shall prosper”* (verse 3). *“The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away”* (verse 4). *“Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish”* (verses 5-6).

In our First Reading, Jeremiah talks about two ways of living, and only two. There is no middle ground. Those who trust in mere mortals are accursed (verses 5-6), but those who trust in the Lord are blessed (verses 7-8). Jeremiah declares with certainty: “Thus says Yahweh” (verse 5a). When the Lord speaks, things happen. When God said, “Let there be light,” there was light (Genesis 1:3). The word of the Lord has power to create and power to destroy: to bestow curses or blessings.

Brothers and sisters: Please understand that it is not a sin to trust people, but it is a sin to trust *in* people - to invest our deepest faith in another person and to derive our dearest hope from that person - to give that person the place in our hearts that rightfully belongs to God.

Our hearts should never depart from Yahweh (verse 5c). We are so constituted that we must make a choice. We can trust in mere flesh or we can

trust in God. We cannot have it both ways. To turn toward something other than the Lord is to turn away from the Lord. We can't face both directions at the same time.

“For he shall be like the barren bush in the desert” (verse 6a). The barren bush or the desert shrub is a metaphor for a person living under harsh circumstances; desert shrubs are not productive. The person who places his/her ultimate trust in mere mortals can expect to live a marginal existence.

Now, let us go to the second reading:

The background of this teaching of St. Paul is that certain Corinthians rejected the Resurrection of Christ, and they denied the possible resurrection of the dead who believed in the Resurrection of Christ.

Paul is trying to make the Corinthians realize how absurd it would be to deny that those who had fallen asleep in Christ would rise. So then what was their error? Corinthians denied an event that was known and witnessed by people who were even living among them.

I want you, my dear brothers and sisters, to realize that the story of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as told by Paul, was older than, and altogether independent of, the Gospels. Paul's account of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ would stand correct and true by itself. The evangelists wrote their gospels long after Paul wrote his letters. The Letter to the Corinthians is one of the four undisputed Epistles of the Apostle, and was written, at the latest, some twenty-seven years after the date of the Crucifixion. It was *universally* believed. It was an absolutely undisputed contemporaneous testimony, because Paul himself heard of it, and resisted it while he was a practicing persecutor of the Church. Nothing beats a personal testimony of the witnesses. It cannot be a fabrication nor a hallucination. How could it be a fabrication or hallucination if five hundred people at once witnessed it? These were experiences that lasted all through long talks/teachings, starting on Easter morning, and spread at intervals over more than a month! How could it be a fabrication or hallucination if it culminated in the change of the lives of these witnesses?

We who belong to this generation are so blessed with the availability of information coming from the entire bible – not like the Corinthians and the early Christians. But the Corinthians had the “blessing of the presence” of the witnesses who were still alive. It must have been sheer pride and hardness of heart that made them deny the good news of the resurrection. We will live our lives with a view of our own resurrection flowing from being united to Christ.

Now, let us go to the Gospel: This is the account of Luke on the Beatitudes. While he situates the event on the plain, Matthew situates it on the mountain (Sermon on the Mount). Luke says: *“Jesus ‘came down with them, and stood on a level place’* (6:17). Luke wanted his Greek readers to see a God who connected with His people on the same level: this is a far departure from the usual/normal idea of a teacher seated on a stool while the learners sit on the floor. I am talking here about the “SCHOLA concept” of the Greeks which says that the teacher or the scholar is always above the learner. But here is Luke, putting the Teacher/Lord on the same level with the people.

Luke places this sermon on the plain later in his Gospel (not like Matthew, chapter 5) because his concern is *emphasis rather than exact chronology*. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus taught the people and engaged with the people in a manner that showed that God was a Loving/Caring Person who was near to them. By doing so, Jesus ruffled feathers and stirred the comfortable authority that the religious leaders held. We can call these incidents of a very engaging Teacher/Master/Lord as CONFLICT STORIES”.

Let us recall Jesus’ visit to the synagogue of His hometown(Nazareth). He “offended/challenged” their religious convictions by saying that the reading was fulfilled even in their hearing. He always made favorable mention of Gentiles (4:20-30), yet the religious leaders tried to defend the traditional understanding of God’s people that they were the “godly Jews” as opposed to the ungodly Gentiles.

Jesus touched a leper (5:13), forgave a man’s sins (5:20-26), called a tax collector and mixed with tax collectors (5:27-32). He did not require His disciples to fast (5:33-39). Jesus allowed His disciples to pluck grain on the

Sabbath (6:1-5). He healed on the Sabbath (6:6-11). The religious leaders wanted to maintain their traditional spirituality like their Sabbath observance. Yet Jesus countered them in each instance, by showing them a new way - but they refused to see.

For Luke, these conflict stories provided the background for Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. In these stories, scribes and Pharisees took offense at Jesus for violating religious taboos.

Jesus then gave His Sermon on the Plain, in which He further turned their legalistic world on its head. In this sermon, Jesus gave them a glimpse into the kingdom of God—an upside-down world by their standards.

Luke cast the scribes and Pharisees in a bad light in these stories. The scribes and Pharisees were trying to be faithful to the law, yet they ignored the prophets, whom their forefathers killed (v. 23). In his Nazareth synagogue sermon, Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2), who expressed God's concern for the oppressed, the brokenhearted, captives, and prisoners (4:18-19). Unfortunately, the concern of the scribes and Pharisees for the status quo left them mired in legalism.

Jesus *“came down with them, and stood on a level place”* to deliver his sermon (verse 17a). The words, “with them” refer back to 6:12-16, where Jesus chose His twelve Apostles. While they were not specifically mentioned in verse 17, it was the Apostles who came down from the mountain with Jesus and were present with Him on the level place.

The mention of *“a great number of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon”* in verse 17b would make us realize that there were three groups of people who were present: The Apostles; (2) a great crowd of disciples; (3) A great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. The places mentioned here are an interesting mix.

Please realize two things:

(1) that Judea is the southern province. Jerusalem, located in Judea, is the home of the temple and the most orthodox Jewish leaders. It represented the religious status quo. They were challenged/opposed by Jesus.

(2) that Tyre and Sidon are Gentile cities on the coast just north of Capernaum. Their mention suggested the presence of Gentiles among the crowd at the Sermon on the Plain.

Together, these four places emphasize the scope of Jesus' ministry:

from far north to far south; from orthodox Jews to Gentiles. He preached a new way of living to all people.

My dear people of God: we know that Jesus experienced a series of conflicts with religious authorities — just as the prophets of the Old Testament experienced opposition and persecution. People were willing to receive gladly anyone who told them what they wanted to hear, but God sent them prophets with a message that they did not want to hear. Yahweh issued a call to repent, to change direction, to quit sinning.

We know that Jesus faithfully delivered that kind of message. Let us listen to Him. Let us not be afraid to practice poverty, to go through sorrow, to be hated, and to be insulted on account of the Son of Man.

Let us rejoice and leap for joy on that day. Our reward will be great in heaven. Amen.