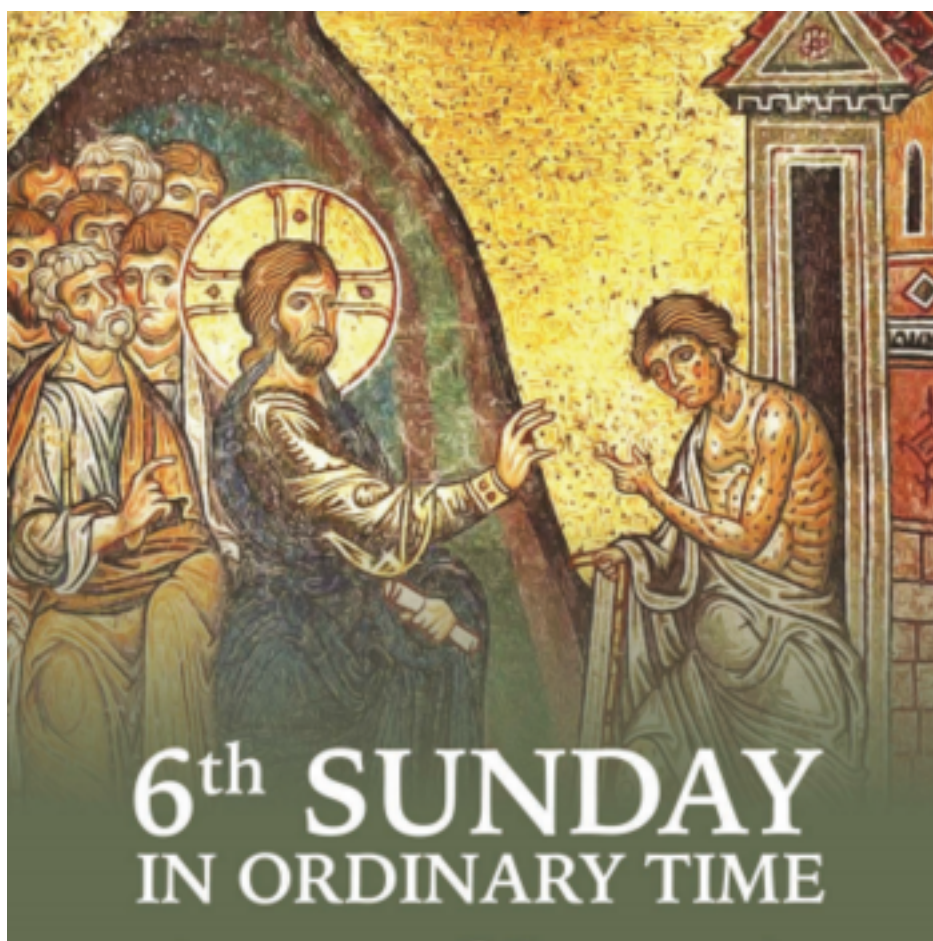


Commentary to the SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

THE BEATITUDES: GOOD NEWS

Introduction

The one who has the money to invest does not rely on the first sales pitch on the street. He asks for information, seeks advice from experts in economics, checks which actions are down and which are rising, which gives significant reliability, and which are on sale. Only at the end, after careful consideration of the risks, does he choose what to buy.



Other actions, instead, depreciate: the service to the last ones without gain, patience, endurance, the renunciation of the superfluous, generosity toward those in need, and moral rectitude. How does one rely on these values considered in our culture: wise, naive, a dreamer, or an idealist?

If we had many lives, we could play one on each wheel, but we have only one, and we cannot make mistakes. The advice from a reliable connoisseur is essential and urgent, but there is the looming danger of choosing the wrong advisor. The wise saying always proves correct: 'Do not trust anyone, not even friends.' Focus on the values ??that God guarantees.

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"Blessed is he who puts his hope in the Lord."

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. —The Word of the Lord.

The reading begins with a sharp but disconcerting statement: Cursed is the man who trusts in man. There is already so much distrust in the world; we are already very suspicious and wary! The painful experience of betrayal, infidelity and conspiracies implemented sometimes by unsuspecting people and friends lead us to coin the saying: 'to trust is good, but not to trust is better.' We are induced to imagine ulterior motives, to assume unacknowledged selfish projects even behind the most sincere and disinterested proposals. Does Jeremiah perhaps invite us to be more cautious, to be even more on guard?

This is not the meaning of the recommendation of the Prophet. He wants to give us a criterion of life and wisdom. Do not put—he says—your confidence in the values ??that people propose. The one who trusts in people is like a shrub planted in dry places, in a salt land where no shrub can grow and develop. The world based on these pseudo-values ??is like an uninhabitable desert; it is a place where you cannot create a social life, where it is impossible to live.

The second part of the reading (vv. 7-8) describes the blessed man, the one pointing to the right actions, those guaranteed by God. He is like a tree planted by water sources. Even during a drought, it keeps the green leaves and produces tasty fruits.

He who plays his life on values ??put forward by people is cursed. It does not mean God will punish him, but he is ruined by focusing on the wrong values. The prophet finds that life built on people's proposals ends in disaster: of all goods to which much time, effort, sacrifices have been dedicated, nothing will remain. Everything will be consumed when *"the fire will show the work of each one"* (1 Cor 3:13).

The person who bases his life on God instead, who believes in the values ??proposed by him, even though to the eyes of people he appears as a failure ... is blessed! It is not said that he will receive a prize, but he has foreseen life. The good done, the love sown, the peace that one has built will remain forever. *"A crucible for silver and a furnace for gold, but the Lord is the tester of hearts"* (Pro 17:3) and, in the end, what matters is his judgment.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

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 in 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.
—The Word of the Lord.

For the Corinthians, the Resurrection of Jesus is not a problem. They are firmly convinced of this. However, the resurrection of people is. On this point, Paul wants the Christians to have a clear idea: “*If the dead are not raised,—he says neither has Christ been raised*” (v. 16). And if Christ is not resurrected, the consequences are dramatic: faith remains without any foundation.

Those who died believing in Christ are lost forever. They disappeared, and it is as if they never existed. And what about the Christians who are still alive? They only merit to be commiserated because they do not enjoy even the pleasures of life, as the pagans do. Paul evidently arrays the colors a bit because, in reality, many lead austere lives even without believing in the resurrection. The fact remains: if Christ is not resurrected, the Christians are deluded.

To explain his idea better, the apostle resorts to the image of the first fruits. The first fruits are not different from the rest of the harvest; they are just the beginning. Christ is like the first fruit of the resurrected ones; all the other people who died after him follow him and share in his resurrection.

All of us happen to have met very good, generous people who live exemplary lives even though they do not believe in life after death. There is no doubt that these will be welcomed in the Father’s house, and even more, they will go ahead of many Christians who are Christians for namesake. If these persons are already living well, why disturb them, announce the resurrection, and speak to them of eternal life?

The Gospel is not a codex of laws to be observed, as some, unfortunately, continue to believe, but it is a proclamation of joy of what God has done for us. It is not right that one lives in ignorance of the great news that concerns him. He must be told of it immediately: “God has a plan of love for you; you will enjoy his salvation; you come from nothing, but you will not return to nothing again. You are born from a gesture of love, and you are destined to an encounter with Love.” All must know that life in this world is a gestation that prepares us for a birth to a new form of life. This hope evaluates all that happens in this life—the joys, sorrows, fortunes, and disgrace—in a completely new perspective.

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.” —The Gospel of the Lord.

Everybody likes compliments. Prestigious, influential, and illustrious persons are particularly appreciated. Jesus also directs his compliments (“blessed” means: “Congratulations for the choice you have made”). He addresses them to four categories of persons and warns against the dangerous choices because they are attractive and apparently gratifying. The rabbis of Jesus’ time often used the literary form of beatitudes and curses.

To inculcate values on which it is worth to build up life, they say: “Blessed is the one...” To warn against deceiving and illusory proposals, they instead use the expression: “Woe to whoever behaves in this or that way.” Jeremiah, too—we have heard him in the First Reading—uses the same wisdom language; he speaks of blessedness and curse. This being the way of communicating used by the wise people in Israel, it is no wonder that tens of beatitudes and repeated threats are found in the Gospels. We remember some of these beatitudes: “*Blessed is she who believed*” (Lk 1:45); “*Blessed the womb that carried you*” (Lk 11:27); “*Blessed are those servants that the master at his return will find still awake*” (Lk 12: 37); “*Blessed are those who will believe even without seeing*” (Jn 20:29); “*When you give banquet invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed*” (Lk 14:13-14); “*Blessed is he who is not scandalized in me*” (Mt 11:6); “*Blessed are your eyes that see*” (Mt 13:16).

These few citations are enough to prove how, in Jesus’ time, the recourse to beatitudes to convey teaching was common. The most noted beatitudes are Matthew (Mt 5:1-12) and those of Luke (Lk 6:20-26) proposed in today’s Gospel. It is worth disclosing the principal differences between these two lists.

In Matthew, Jesus proclaimed the Beatitudes sitting on top of a mountain (Mt 5:1), while in Luke, he announces them in a plain (Lk 6:17), which is a minor detail. In Matthew, there are eight beatitudes, whereas, in Luke, there are only four and are accompanied by many “Woe to you!” is more significant.

Matthew “spiritualizes” the Beatitudes. He speaks of ‘... the poor in spirit,’ of people who ‘hunger and thirst for justice....’ In Luke, the beatitudes are rather strongly ‘terrestrial.’ He

says: "*Blessed are you poor, you who are hungry now, you who weep now*" and denounces as dangerous the opposite situations: "*Woe to you who are rich, for you who are full now, to you who laugh now.*" There is nothing "spiritual." In Luke, it is all very real.

Now we come to today's passage. To understand it, it is necessary to establish to whom the beatitudes are addressed. "*There was a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people ... he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, he said: Blessed are you poor ...*" (vv. 17-20). It is clear that the recipients of the 'beatitudes' and the subsequent 'woe to you' are not the crowds but only the disciples and, ultimately, the Christian community.

Let us start with the first beatitude: Blessed are you poor! In what sense Peter, Andrew, John, and the other apostles are considered poor? Indeed, they are neither rich nor miserable. They own a home and a boat; many people are worse off. Why are they the only ones proclaimed blessed? What extraordinary thing have they done?

To understand the significance of this beatitude, we can start from the last verse of last Sunday's Gospel. After the miraculous catch of fish, Jesus entrusts to Simon the task of removing men from death and bringing them to life. Luke concludes: "*They pulled their boats to land, they left everything and followed him*" (Lk 5:11). A little later in the same chapter, another call is narrated, that of Levi, and the conclusion is the same: "*And leaving everything, he rose and followed him*" (Lk 5:28).

In Luke's Gospel, to leave everything is taken as a kind of refrain, at the end of each call: "*Sell everything you have, give to the poor*"—Jesus asks the wealthy aristocrat (Lk 18:22). This voluntary poverty is not optional, not a counsel reserved for some who want to behave like heroes or be better. It is what characterizes the Christian: "*Any of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple*" (Lk 14:33).

How to deprive themselves of all the goods? Should they throw away everything they have and reduce themselves to misery, and become beggars? It would be a foolish and senseless interpretation of Jesus' words. He never despised wealth; he never invited them to destroy it. He denounced, yes, the risks and dangers: the heart can get attached to them and can become an insurmountable obstacle for those who want to enter the kingdom of God (Lk 18:24-25). The goods of this world are precious, essential to life, but must be kept in place. There is woe if we overestimate them or worse, turn them into idols.

The one who, enlightened by the word of Christ, gives the goods their proper value is poor in the evangelical sense. He appreciates, esteems them; he knows that they are a gift from God. Because they are a gift, one should appropriate them. He realizes that they do not belong to him, that he is only an administrator, and invests them by the plans of the master. He received everything as a gift; he transformed them as a gift.

Poor in the evangelical sense is the one who does not possess anything for himself, gives up

worshiping money, and refuses the selfish use of their time, of their intellectual abilities, erudition, diplomas, and social position ... He is similar to the Father in heaven who, while possessing all, is infinitely poor because he does not keep anything for himself; he is a total gift.

The ideal of the Christian is not poverty but a world of evangelical poor. In this world, no one accumulates for oneself, no one squanders, and each put everything he has received from God at the brothers' disposition. 'Blessed are you poor!' is not a message of resignation, but of hope, hope in a new world where no one is in need (Acts 4:34).

The promise that accompanies this beatitude does not refer to a distant future, does not ensure the entry into heaven after death, but announces an immediate joy: 'Yours is the Kingdom of God.' From the moment one chooses to be and to remain poor, they enter the 'Kingdom of God' in a new condition.

Those who do not make this decisive step continue to think according to earthly logic. They have their hearts tied to their wealth and have placed their hopes of happiness in them. They are not free They are not yet blessed. Only true disciples are blessed because they understand that human life does not depend on the goods they possess and, not having the heart tied to 'money,' they can also open it to salvation that goes beyond this world.

What are the consequences of the choice of evangelical poverty? What should the disciples who renounce the selfish use of wealth expect? Jesus responds to these questions with the second beatitude: "*Blessed are you who are hungry now*" (v.21).

No illusion, no deception, no promise of an easy, wealthy, and comfortable life. Real hunger, not the spiritual one, will be the inevitable consequence for those who put everything they own in service of others. They will experience poverty, hardships, and privations; sometimes, they will lack even the necessary, but they will be blessed.

To them, Jesus addresses his compliments and assures: "*The Lord will fill you up.*" Through you, God will build the new world in which every hunger, every need will be satisfied; through you, God will prepare a banquet for all those who do not have the minimum required for subsistence (Is 25: 6-8), through you he "*will satisfy his poor with bread*" (Ps 132:15), "*will give food to the hungry*" (Ps 146:7).

The third beatitude—"*Blessed are you who weep now*"—also takes into consideration a state of distress and pain (v. 21). The one who makes himself poor experiences sadness and despair because, despite all his sacrifices and commitment, he does not immediately and miraculously see the problems of the poor solved. He experiences disappointment and even comes to the point of crying.

God will comfort him, transforming his cry into joy. The seeds of the good he casts in pain will grow and give abundant fruit (Ps 126:6). His condition is similar to that of a woman about to

give birth. She *"is afflicted, but when she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for the joy that a man has come into the world"* (Jn 16:21).

The last beatitude—*Blessed are you when you are persecuted, insulted, hated ...*—is different from the previous ones. It is long; it does not describe the current condition of the disciples but announces that something painful will happen in the future; it does not contain the promise of a reversal of the situation but invites them to rejoice and rejoice even when they become objects of harassment on account of the Son of Man (vv.22-23).

The one who refuses to comply with the principles that dominate in this world—selfishness, competition, oppression, the search for self-interest—is fought and banned as dangerous to the established order. The ancient world is not resigned to disappear, does not consent to surrender peacefully the passage to a society founded on the principles of gift, the availability of selfless service, the search for the last place. The disciple who opts for this new world is at odds with the mentality shared by many and is immediately isolated and persecuted. The approval and the consent of people is a negative sign. Persecution is the fate that all the just ones share: the prophets of the Old Testament were treated that way.

The disciple is not happy "despite" the persecution; he does not rejoice because one day the suffering will end and, in the future, he will enjoy a reward in heaven. He is blessed at the very moment when he is persecuted. Persecution is irrefutable proof that he is following the Master. The four woes add nothing to this message; they simply negatively reaffirm the beatitudes. They are directed to the disciples to warn them of the danger still looming on them, the lure of the 'logic of Satan,' by the principles of this world.

He who starts again to worship the bank account and career, who thinks of one's interest, loses oneself behind the flattery and seduction of wealth, accumulates for oneself and squanders, while others are crying and dying of hunger, is 'cursed.' It is not that God hates him or punishes him. He is 'cursed' because he has made the wrong choice. He placed himself outside the "Kingdom of God." He receives the praise and compliments of people, but not of God.

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