

Reflection for the 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/021625.cfm>

1st Reading: *Jeremiah 17:5–8*

The first six chapters of Jeremiah relate to the reform of Josiah. The next thirteen chapters come from the period after Josiah died and the people went back to worshipping false gods, neglecting the needs of the poor, and living according to worldly wisdom. These thirteen chapters are mostly condemnations of the people's failure to live the Law and warn of impending punishment, the Babylonian Captivity. Today's selection uses the literary technique of opposing blessings and curses to show what life is like when we live according to God's will and what happens when we don't.

2nd Reading: *1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20*

This is Paul's argument for resurrection. If you listen closely, you will hear him say that we believe in Christ not just for benefits in this life but ultimately for our own resurrection into eternity.

Gospel: *Luke 6:17, 20-26*

Blest are you who are poor... Lk 6:20a

Gospel Reflection

I have a friend, Sarah, who was diagnosed as bipolar when she tried to commit suicide at the age of sixteen. She's gone now, and although having relationship with her was difficult, I miss her. I sat with her at times when she was having one of her psychotic episodes, which she had every four or five years. I experienced things I had only previously seen in movies. She was real.

In all of her "craziness", she had an extremely intimate and palpable relationship with Jesus. She felt for him and cried over his experiences as a human being. She loved him deeply and asked over and over why she had to suffer the mental/emotional sickness her life had given her. She is gone now and I assume she has her answer.

For my part, I'm convinced her experiences of the Lord were real. And, from the stories we tell, I wonder if many of our great saints could have been considered as mentally unstable as she. Sometimes I think it is our clinging to the realities of this world that keeps us from experiencing the realities of the transcendent world. Many times, I thought how lucky she was to suffer as she did but, in that suffering, to experience the deep reality of the Lord's presence.

That's how I feel when I read Luke's version of what we call "the beatitudes", the "blessings". I mean "Blest (That's what the Greek word means, not "holy")... Blest are you who are poor"!!? That Greek word actually means "destitute". Where is the blessing in that?

Obviously, the blessing is that you have nothing else to depend on, other than God. You are forced, so to speak, into opening yourself to God's love in your life... however that is experienced, much like Sarah was forced into experiencing deep but painful intimacy with the Lord. What a blessing!

I'm not sure I want that blessing, but I do want to experience the Lord in an equally profound way. So what do I do? The first thing, I think, is to practice detachment. I learned this from the Marianist religious order. Different from the Franciscans who give up the things of this world, the Marianist goal is to engage in and use the things of this world. They use the things of this world for the glory of God, not for their own personal interests. That's detachment. I like that idea. It's just hard to practice in a pure sense.

Secondly, I think, we have to live life authentically. I'm a man, and a person I know says that men only have two emotions, mad and not mad. But that is not living life authentically, is it? That allows us to avoid the whole range and nuances of emotions that are necessary to authentically encounter the life God gives us. We have to let ourselves suffer, if we are going to experience God, and can't replace that with anger or anything else.

Thirdly, we have to live lives that stand for the truth. When I say that, I mean the truth of God's love... the truth of God's love for each and every human being, no matter how different from us they may be. Remember, he loves the saint and the sinner. We have to stand up for that truth even when it is not socially or politically acceptable. That is what God wants from us and that is where the promise of a great reward in heaven comes from.

The blessings, as presented in the Gospel of Luke are tough. Do we have what it takes to benefit from them? Let's try. That's what our Lord wants.

Personal Reflection:

Blest are you who are poor... Lk 6:20a

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon a time when you experienced some difficulty in your life. What were the negative effects of that difficulty? Did you discover a hidden blessing, either at that time or later? How will your discovery of hidden blessings help you have courage to experience suffering in the future?

Verse by Verse:

Lk 6:17b "...and stood on a stretch of level ground." | This is different from the Sermon on the Mount. This is after he went up the mountain to pray and where he chose the twelve and "whom he also named apostles." This is where he came down to engage the people.

Lk 6:20a "And raising his eyes toward his disciples..." | This Sermon on the Plain is oriented toward the disciples and presumably talking about the great crowd that came to hear him, which includes disciples.

Lk 6:20b "...blessed are you..." | The word translated as "blessed" here means blest. Some people have a tendency to think it means "holy". It doesn't. It means "blest by God".

Lk 6:23b "...your reward will be great in heaven..." | These blessing and woes are about our experience of the afterlife. We may have to suffer here but we will be rewarded then. In some cases though, the

beginning of the blessing can be experienced in life on earth. The poor, who are blessed because they have nothing to rely upon but God, experience his love in their poverty.

Lk 6:26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you...” | This is the last of the blessings and woes but it is not the last of the Sermon on the Plain. We will hear the rest of the Sermon on the Plain over the next two Sundays.

“These beatitudes and woes serve only as a starting-point for the heart of his [Jesus’] message, the love which must dominate the life of the Christian disciple. It is a love of one’s neighbor, and even of one’s enemy—of those who may hate, curse, mistreat, beat, rob, and deprive Christians of what is rightfully theirs. The motivation proposed for such love is the love or mercy of God himself, the father of Christian existence, which is to be imitated.” AYBC Fitzmyer