

Blessed are You who Trust in God, 100%!

6th Sunday of the Year – Cycle C – 17 February 2019

Readings: Jer 17:5-8; 1 Cor 15:12,16-20; Lk 6:17,20-26

“A curse on the one who puts one’s trust in Man” (Jer)

Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. The first reading begins with: “Thus says the Lord” Prophet Jeremiah, God’s mouthpiece and microphone, so to say, foretells the terrible misfortunes that will befall the people of Judah on account of their waywardness. Their main sin is turning away from the God of the Covenant who has been faithful, loving and providential to them. Sadly, despite repeated reminders, they choose to trust in Man, i.e., human resources, rather than to depend totally on God, i.e., Divine Providence. Jeremiah does not wish evil and condemnation upon anyone, but states the inevitable; namely, if one’s heart is “turned away from God,” one will experience tepidity, aridity, decay and death. Those foolish people who forsake God actually invite curses upon themselves: “Cursed is the one!” The language of the prophesy is poetic and evocative because he uses bipolar imagery that the people are familiar with: (a) a shrub in the wilderness, and, (b) a tree planted by the water. Indeed, the people will repent because they will eventually realize that their dependence on Man is useless, for they will lose their identity, land, kingdom and temple and be exiled in a pagan country, emptied of everything that they hold precious.

2. It is not difficult to see that the theme of blessing and curse of Jeremiah’s prophecy is reiterated in today’s Gospel passage according to Luke, with the curse and blessing in reverse order. This passage of the so-called ‘*Beatitudes*’ is more popularly known as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ since, in the parallel text in the Gospel of Matthew (5:2-12), Jesus gives his teaching from a *mountain*—reminiscent of Moses giving God’s Law from Mount Sinai. However, in today’s passage, “Jesus *came down* with them and stood on a *level place*,” meaning, this is the ‘Sermon on the *Plain*’. Moreover, when one compares the language between Matthew’s beatitudes and Luke’s, the Lucan language is quite literally ‘*plain-speak*’! Jesus does not mince words. While Matthew has “poor *in spirit*” [third person, singular or plural], Luke has: “Blessed are *you* who are poor!” [second person, singular]. The language is crystal clear and direct, addressed to each one of Jesus’ hearer-disciples, and, to you and me, today. Moreover, while Matthew has nine ‘beatitudes’ Luke has only four, with each ‘beatitude’ having its corresponding ‘woe’: poor opposed to rich, hungry juxtaposed against full, weeping contrasted with laughing, and hated (like prophets) as antithesis to ‘spoken well of’ (like false prophets).

3. ‘Beatitude’ is derived from the Latin ‘*beatus*’, meaning happy, blest, fortunate and so on. Jesus complements and assures the riff raff, *Janata*, common wo/man of their blessedness not because material poverty is good and God is happy to see poverty and misery increase in our world – certainly not! If God is truly our *Abba*-Father, then God must surely be deeply pained to see so many of our sisters and brothers being poor, hungry, naked, despised and exploited in various ways. So, we must interpret Luke’s gospel within its’ overall thrust of being the ‘gospel of the poor’. Apart from his close circle of disciples,

those who were standing before Jesus and listening to him were “a great multitude of people” who came “to be healed of their diseases” and those “troubled by unclean spirits” (6:17-19). These were truly the Biblical ‘poor’—the *anawim*—who, mindful of their ‘lack’ in various ways, *totally* trusted in God, 100%. They sought their support and salvation solely in God’s Providence, not Man’s power. In Luke’s gospel, one can think of so-called ‘sinners’ like tax-collector, Zacchaeus, who is ‘blessed’ and saved (Lk 19:1-10), while the rich young man totally attached to his wealth (Lk 18:18-30), goes away sad – cursed!

Possible Link in the 2nd Reading: The second reading provides a vital link to differentiate between those who trust in God and those who trust in Man. The latter group craves for power, pleasure and prestige—eat, drink and be merry—since they do not truly believe in the resurrection. But, for those who believe in the resurrection, there is the promise of a ‘tomorrow’—God’s tomorrow—and therein comes their total trust in a Providential God who alone can fill and fulfill.

The Refrain of the Psalm (1) is obviously very direct and clear: “Happy the man who has placed his trust in the Lord.” Note that the imagery of “tree planted by the waters” is used here, too.

Three Texts from Catholic Tradition:

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430): “Trust the past to God’s mercy, the present to God’s love, and the future to God’s providence.”

St. Ephrem (306-373) is credited with some 55 beatitudes among which are: “Blessed the one who has become wholly free in the Lord from all the earthly things of this vain life and loved God alone, the good and compassionate.” And, “Blessed the one who has become a good ploughman of the virtues and raises a harvest of fruits of life in the Lord, like a ploughed field bearing wheat.”

Pope Francis in ‘*Gaudete et Exsultate*’ [n.63]: “The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card. So, if anyone asks: “What must one do to be a good Christian?”, the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master which we are called to reflect in our daily lives.”

Three Contextual Concerns:

New Age Take on Wealth: Gurus like the late ‘Osho’ [Rajneesh] declared: “Cursed are the poor! Blessed are the rich!” Has our spirituality made us feel comfortable with wealth?

How credible is our ‘religious vow’ of poverty? Don’t we often justify our luxurious institutional, lifestyles by saying: “Jesus only means poverty *in spirit*, not actual poverty”?

Pope Francis’s call to ‘be’ a poor church requires our reflection and individual/ecclesial response.

In Lighter Vein:

An airplane developed engine trouble while flying into rough weather. The pilot announced: “I regret to inform you we’re in serious trouble. Only God can save us now!” An elderly, partly-deaf passenger seated next to a priest asked, “What did the pilot say?” The priest replied, “He says there is no hope!” Often, though we, priests and religious, preach about trusting in God, whenever we run into rough weather and are tossed about due to life’s storms, do we really trust God, 100%?
