

GOSPEL

LUKE 6:17, 20-26

Jesus came down with the Twelve and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.

Then fixing his eyes on his disciples he said: 'How happy are you who are poor; yours is the kingdom of God. Happy you who are hungry now: you shall be satisfied. Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh. 'Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

'But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep. 'Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. It seems strange to be happy about any of the hardships for the sake of the Gospel that Jesus describes. Have you ever experienced joy in a difficult situation? What happened?
2. Jesus is saying that poverty for his sake in this life is actually an indicator of a spiritual wealth. How might we invest in greater spiritual wealth in our lives?
3. How do you feel your spiritual wealth is going at the moment?

A REFLECTION BY POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT

Today the liturgical year brings us to "a level place", where Jesus stops with the Twelve and where a crowd of other disciples and people who had come from everywhere gather to listen to him. This is the setting for the proclamation of the "Beatitudes". Why does he proclaim the different groups blessed? Because God's justice will ensure that they will be satisfied, gladdened, recompensed for every false accusation, in a word, because from this moment he will welcome them into his Kingdom.

The Beatitudes are based on the fact that a divine justice exists, which exalts those who have been wrongly humbled and humbles those who have exalted themselves. In fact, the Evangelist Luke, after repeating four times "blessed are you", adds four admonitions: "Woe to you that are rich.... that are full now.... that laugh now..." and "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you", because as Jesus affirms, the circumstances will be reversed; the last will be first, and the first will be last.

This justice and this Beatitude are realized in the "Kingdom of Heaven", or the "Kingdom of God", which will be fulfilled at the end of time but which is already present in history. Wherever the poor are comforted and admitted to the banquet of life, there God's justice is already manifest. This is the work that the Lord's disciples are called to carry out also in today's society. I warmly encourage all who work in every part of the world, volunteering themselves generously in works of justice and of love.

Christ's Gospel responds positively to humanity's thirst for justice, but in an unexpected and surprising way. He does not propose a social or political revolution but rather a proposition of love, which he has already brought about with his Cross and his Resurrection. It is on these that are founded the Beatitudes which present a new horizon of justice, unveiled at Easter, thanks to which we can become just and build a better world.

Dear friends, let us turn now to the Virgin Mary. All the generations call her "blessed", because she believed the good news that the Lord proclaimed. Let us be guided by her, to be freed from the illusion of self-sufficiency, to recognize that we need God and his mercy, and thus to enter into his Kingdom of justice, of love and of peace.

REFLECTION QUESTION

- What has struck you from this reflection by Pope Emeritus Benedict?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God
4. Prayer for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.