

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.’

HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II
16 February 1992 (Excerpt, Translated)

1. We have listened to the passage from the Gospel of Saint Luke, which contains the discourse of the Beatitudes. It is a kind of solemn proclamation of the Kingdom of God, a synthesis of the evangelical preaching, which shows what in the eyes of God has value in the life of man and what in it has no value. Luke marks this contrast, using the terms blessed and woe. Blessed are the poor, those who are hungry, those who weep, those who suffer persecution because of justice. They will possess the Kingdom of Heaven, they will be satisfied, they will rejoice, they will have a great reward. Instead, woe is for the rich, for those who are satisfied, who laugh and who are applauded. They have already received their reward.

We are invited to consider the contrast between two scales of values or, better, between two wisdoms: that of the world which is ephemeral and the divine which is eternal. In a civilization like ours, where having prevails over being, and money becomes an idol, to which every other value is sacrificed, only the call of the evangelical beatitudes can free us from the worry for things, can make us rediscover the true hierarchy of the realities that count. The beatitudes express the radical reversal of the values that Jesus brought about. With them the fulfillment of the ancient messianic promises is proclaimed. Whoever says yes to Jesus experiences the joy of feeling included in the history of salvation, sharing in the fate of the prophets. Whoever, on the other hand, says no to the Lord and does not believe in his Gospel, excludes himself from the saving ray, placing himself not in the area of the "beatitudes", but in that of the "woes". The Lord reveals a different type of wealth and a different type of poverty, so that his announcement can be paraphrased as follows: "blessed" are you, poor, because in reality you are rich, woe to you, rich, because in reality you are poor! You can be poor. This is also the thought of the apostle James, when he writes in his Letter: "Has not God chosen the poor in the world to make them rich through faith and heirs of the Kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?" (James 2:5). The contrast, therefore, is not between the rich and the poor, but between the rich in front of the world and the rich in front of God.

2. These challenging words of the Lord serve to make us understand that the Christian must not base his certainties on earthly things, which are by their nature unstable and fleeting, and risk making us forget the purpose for which God created us. The words of the prophet Jeremiah also go in this direction, when he exclaims: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man... Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord". The certainties of the Christian are in God, from whom he comes and to whom he will return, they are in his Son Jesus Christ, who, as Saint Paul explains in the passage of the First Letter to the Corinthians, is truly resurrected from the dead, thus

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making faith solid and the forgiveness of sins certain. With this the faithful do not reject earthly realities, but use them to better serve God and his brothers, without allowing himself to be entangled in them or idolatrous, knowing full well that it is only God who can guarantee the true, definitive, final happiness of man.

3. A synthesis of these thoughts is contained in the refrain of the first Psalm that we recited in chorus: "Blessed is he who puts his hope in the Lord". The whole Psalm explains that man is blessed if he delights in the law of the Lord, that is, if he makes appropriate choices. He will be like a tree planted by streams of water, laden with leaves and fruit in its season, while the wicked will be like chaff that the wind scatters. These truths must be recalled to the conscience and practice of life of Christians with all the more force, the more they seem to have become alien to what appears today to be the common way of reasoning, evaluating and behaving in our time, often conditioned by practical materialism, fueled by secularization, consumerism and a subtle nihilism, which takes away value from everything that is not an immediate gain.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: "The rich in front of the world and the rich in front of God": Why are these two things at odds?



Heart: What does it mean to you that "only God can guarantee the true, definitive, final happiness of [people]"? Do you feel you live like you believe this?



Hands: How can we live like the "blessed" people Jesus mentions this week?

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. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.