

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Luke 6:17, 20-26

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon.

Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

REFLECTION 1: A LIFE-GIVING TEACHER

A letter appeared in the press from an elderly gentleman who was obviously poor in health and in straitened circumstances. He admitted that earlier in life he had spent some time in prison. In his letter he explained that many people had come to his residence, social workers, church personnel, and neighbours, to help him and to make sure he was not too lonely. ‘They all invited themselves into my home’, he wrote, ‘but not once, did anyone ever invite me back to theirs’.

The tone of the letter was disappointment rather than bitterness and perhaps we can sympathize with this. People were giving of their time to him, but they were not giving of themselves. In a sense, the visits of the well-meaning emphasised the fact that this man was dependent on outside charity.

Jesus Christ invited himself into the home of humankind. He became human like us and he did this for one reason only - to invite us back into his own home, his heavenly home. Paul says today that if Christ has not Risen from the dead, then his mission is without meaning and if there is no Resurrection from the dead, then Jesus is no more than a kind man who comes to offer cold comfort in our hopelessness.

The truth is that Jesus Christ came to offer, what, in the end, is the one thing that can make life worth living. He didn't come to give us a little of his time, for a pleasant chat, he came to give us himself; ‘I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly’. And in giving himself, he offers us an opportunity to give of ourselves.

The heart of all that Jesus said and did is in today's Gospel, ‘Blessed are you who are poor, yours is the Kingdom of heaven....but alas for you who are rich, you have your consolation now’. Some people have seen in this ‘upside-down’ teaching, no more than homely wisdom, while others have seen something to take refuge in. When we are down and depressed and people are against us, we can take consolation in today's Gospel, that eventually we will get our own back, one day we will be vindicated, and they will be the ones to suffer. Neither of these views of today's Gospel approach the facts of our faith. The truth is that Jesus is offering nothing less than a share in his own life. Luke presents us with the stark choice that disciples of Jesus most face. There are two contrasting universes; the world of the kingdom of God, and the world of those whose vision is earthbound. None of us is simply an inhabitant

of one or the other world: we are all sinners. The question is whether we are aware of the challenge and are prepared to begin moving in the way of the Lord.

Today's readings present us with the main choice in life that faces each one of us. In the words of the first reading from Jeremiah, do we put our trust in men or in the Lord? In the words of the Gospel, presented with such solemnity by Jesus, do we seek the consolations of this life or the consolation of being with Jesus? As Paul reminds us in today's letter, Christ has risen from the dead, so we can place our hopes in him.