

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 15, 2004

By Father Charles Bowes

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Jeremiah 17:5-8  
1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20  
Luke 6:17, 20-26

## *The world receives hope in Jesus Christ in the measure of its acknowledged need for God.*

When Jesus gives his Beatitudes in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, he first climbs a mountain, as if to indicate that what he is going to say is as yet above us: an ideal, a promised outcome of the long climb ahead. When he gives his Beatitudes in the Gospel of Saint Luke, he comes down from the mountain into the plain, at the level where we live and where his listeners had assembled. He was one with the people.

Those listeners had come from very far, from all parts of Judea, from Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon. They had come, the gospel explains, to hear him and be cured. The people assembled were men and women who had left their homes, jobs, work, worries, and opportunities behind. They had gone a long way to hear him and to be helped by him.

Then, looking at them, fixing his eyes on his disciples, Jesus said, "How happy are you who are poor! How happy are you who are hungry! How happy are you who weep now!" What did he mean?

Was he insinuating that poverty - with its squalor; bedbugs; lice; fleas; its unavoidable rats; prostitution; child death; hunger; starvation; lack of education, sanitation, security, and vitamins; tuberculosis; rabies; scabies; and deformation - makes anyone happy?

Of course not! How could he? He was, on the contrary, speaking to people and about people who were hoping to have all that changed!

Take the incident as it stands. He came down from the mountain after a night of prayer. As he came down, he saw those hundreds, maybe thousands, waiting for him. What did they come for? They came because they hoped for a change. They came because they wanted to see. They wanted to hear. They wanted to know. They came because they knew themselves to be poor, hungry, thirsty, ignorant, frustrated, and sad. They came because they were eager for a change: greater integrity, greater human dignity, greater justice, and more joy. They were powerless, and precisely because they were without, God could come and dwell within.

That is why he praised them and blessed them. Those people, who considered themselves in danger and helpless, were (and are!) the hope of this world. They were the ones willing to listen to him. They had nothing, and here at least was something, some hope, some ray of light, because of that emptiness and willingness.

There is hope because of that willingness. Jesus told them that if they would really listen, the whole world would change. The change will come because God could draw near.

“Blessed are you poor..But woe to you rich” (Luke 6:20, 24). “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” does not mean: “Accept your poverty, because later this injustice will be compensated for in the reign of God.” No, rather, Christ says that the poor are blessed because the kingdom of God has begun: “The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you” (Mark 1:15). In other words, the elimination of the exploitation and poverty that prevent the poor from being fully human has begun; a reign of justice which goes beyond what they could have hoped for has begun. They are blessed because the coming of the kingdom will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of equality. They are blessed because the Messiah will open the eyes of the blind and give bread to the hungry.

And we, you and I, are both the agents and the recipients of that change, that Spirit of the Risen Lord precisely in the measure of our emptiness and need. That’s what brings us to this table and to this fellowship. We are each and everyone blessed by the future we touch here, and for which we receive nourishment to bring about.

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