

**6th Sunday of the Year  
February 11, 2007  
By Father Charles Bowes**

**Jeremiah 17:5-8  
Psalm 1:1-4, 6  
1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20  
Luke 6:17-26**

## *We need God's help, even to ask for God's help.*

When I hear this Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 6, I always come away upset.

Here, in just a few sentences, Jesus manages to alienate everyone who hears him. The folks like me who have cars and credit cards and food and places to live are told they're in for a bad time. And those who already experience bad times (the poor, the suffering, the sick, the unemployed) are told that they are really the blessed ones. I'm reminded of the comment of a great African political leader, Julius Nyerere, who observed, "I know we African people are seen as blessed and close to the land, but must we live in mud huts?" It just doesn't make sense - that those blessed with seeming good things are called woe-filled, and those cursed with seeming bad things are called blessed. Nobody wins in Jesus' world.

And that, apparently, is precisely the point - nobody wins - it's all in God's hands. All are dependent on God. Whether rich or poor, slave or free, successful or a failure - all depend on God. No one goes it alone. Life, all life, successful or not, depends on trust - trust in God. When you're used to life in the fast lane, working hard to get ahead, working overtime to pay the bills, trying hard to save for college, retirement or just a summer vacation...it's really hard to slow down

and try to figure out what Jesus means when he says things like: Cursed is the athlete who's just signed a \$5 million dollar contract; cursed are those who travel professionally and speak on lecture circuits and dine at four-star restaurants; cursed are the handsome and the popular kids at school; cursed are the cheerleaders and those whose parents drive around with bumper stickers proclaiming, "Proud Parent of an Honor Roll Student."

We wonder, "What's wrong with this? What's wrong with applauding and admiring and emulating those who are successful, talented and well-heeled?" And while we are wondering about all this, this car called faith we're traveling in with Jesus suddenly veers into a shantytown, and Jesus' words become even more confusing as he points to a trailer park and says, "Those people, the ones with rusted vehicles whose husbands are on probation, whose kids are failing in school and experimenting with drugs...you know the type I'm talking about. All those folks living off welfare and weighted down with credit card debt, let me tell you something." He turns off the car and looks at you with a kind of wild-eyed stare. "Well," he says, "these folks don't know how lucky they are."

Frightening, isn't it? When you translate today's gospel and put it into today's words, it's a little bit like

finding yourself on a back road in an unfamiliar place with someone you're not sure you can trust.

We're not used to looking at our Lord and Savior in this way. And suddenly we begin to understand, in some partial way, why the people of his hometown got so agitated with him that they told him to hit the road and be on his way. Now, at that time, as one of his followers, we decided to go along with this Jesus whom we claim to admire and serve. I'd be surprised if there was a single one of us in this church who, upon hearing the gospel passage that was read at Mass just two weeks ago, Luke chapter 4 - that passage about Jesus getting kicked out of his hometown - I sincerely doubt that any one of us questioned whether or not we should continue to tag along with the new rabbi. After all, we know how the story ends, and we are going to do all we can to stay on the side of the Winner.

But now we come to this passage, Luke chapter 6, and we find ourselves on a dead-end road in a shantytown, hooked up with someone who's not making a lot of sense. And that's precisely the point at which this passage is designed to drop us off. In this reading today, the Lord is asking us whether or not we've come to "the tipping point," that point at which we are going to put trust in God as opposed to ourselves. The "different way of life" to which the Lord calls us has nothing to do with whether one lives with or without electricity. It has little to do with where one lives or what one eats or how much one eats. The point of the passage is the issue of trust - trust in God and in the ways of God. And the most disquieting

thing of all is that we can't even do that, we can't even trust in God without God's help. So let us pray: "God, you give life, but not always by a path I would prefer. May I trust in you in times of darkness and rejoice when you give light, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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ask for God's help.