



The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER

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THE FORTUNATE AND THE UNFORTUNATE: 6 SUNDAY C

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

Sometimes when Jesus speaks, he comforts. At other times, he challenges. Today he is challenging you and me. I hear him asking us three questions: 1. What makes you truly happy? 2. What 'hungers' and longings drive you? And 3. What makes you weep?

On level ground, in the presence of his first followers and a big crowd of curious others, he speaks his four beatitudes and his four woes – four ways of being fortunate or unfortunate. He turns many of our assumptions upside down. We hear him say: Blessed are you, who are poor, who are hungry, who weep, and who are hated. Woe to you who are rich, who are full, who laugh, and who are honoured.

The story is told of a black woman who was hired as a live-in housekeeper for a white wealthy couple in California. The couple lived in a magnificent house with fourteen bedrooms, a swimming pool, a spa, three cars, and a manicured garden. Every day their housekeeper served them and their frequent guests the most delicious meals. But as the years passed and the couple grew old, they stopped entertaining. Eventually, they settled for an evening meal of just scrambled egg, toast, and weak tea, and even stopped talking to one another as they ate it. On Saturday nights, meanwhile, their housekeeper would invite some of her friends to her basement flat. There they would eat some plain but good food, share a few drinks, tell jokes, play cards, and laugh and dance the evening away together. One night amid all their hilarity, the door opened. There in the hallway were her employers. 'We don't want to disturb you,' they said. 'But on Saturday nights we hear you all having such a good time, we'd just like to watch you. Could you leave your door a little ajar then, so we can share a bit in the fun? We promise we won't intrude; we won't make a sound.'

That true story illustrates how the poor can be better off than the rich. Their secret lies in their love of life, and their ability to get great pleasure from little things and simple things. Too many rich people, accustomed to so much ease and comfort, expect good things to keep coming their way, and so they bring no great joy when they get them. Many poor people, on the other hand, have much harder lives and are all the more grateful for those good things of life that they receive as surprises, as gifts they were not expecting.

Some rich people tend to rely on their riches. It's this world that matters, and any thought of cultivating an everlasting relationship with God is remote and hazy. On the other hand, many poor people tend to turn to God with trust in God's goodness and care. As a poor old lady said to her priest: 'Isn't it great that we have God to lean on?'

It's not that poverty in itself is a good thing. When Jesus says that the poor and hungry are fortunate, he is not endorsing abject poverty and starvation. These are evil things that rob human beings of their dignity. He is speaking of too much commitment to the pursuit of money, pleasure, popularity, power, and fame, and too little commitment to such satisfying

values of the Kingdom of God as detachment from riches, honesty, sincerity, integrity, kindness, compassion, generosity, peace-making, forgiveness, and defending the victims of injustice and oppression.

The poverty that is blessed is the poverty of those who put their trust in God rather than in material things and superficial benefits. Ultimately, only God can fill our emptiness and satisfy the deepest hunger of our human hearts. St Augustine put it so well when he wrote: 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you' (*Confessions*, Bk.1).

Jesus is urging his listeners to trust in God and to rely on God as the one source of life, here and hereafter. As needy people in the gospel did – people like Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachariah, the shepherds and wise men, Simeon and Anna, and Jesus himself!

God is your King, Jesus keeps insisting. God has come and keeps coming into your life and mine to take away our misery, to feed our pangs of hunger, and to put a smile on our faces. For God is 'the God of the humble, the help of the oppressed, the support of the weak, the refuge of the forsaken, the Saviour of the despairing' (Judith 9:11). God is with us as our Companion on our journey of life, to lift us out of our misery, and not because we deserve it, but because we need it.

To have such trust in God's providence - God's goodness, kindness, and care - is to be like a thriving tree planted by a flowing river.

As a practical response to his challenge during this coming week, why not consider giving a 'scary' amount to a charity or justice organization? Or some time and skills to some other needy group? Or outreach to a lonely neighbour, an elderly relative, or a child crying out for affection and attention? Let's make a definite choice that involves personal generosity!

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