

Homily for the 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

February 16, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-8 (Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.)

Responsory: Psalm 1 (Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.)

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20 (Christ has been raised from the dead.)

Gospel: Luke 6:17, 20-26 (Beatitudes and woes.)

Today we heard Luke's version of the Beatitudes, taken from Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain." This passage certainly bears some resemblance to Matthew's version of the Beatitudes, at the beginning of Jesus' more famous "Sermon on the *Mount*." However, there are a number of significant differences. For one thing, in Luke's version, Jesus is clearly speaking to his disciples about *their present circumstances*, declaring them to be blessed despite the hardships that they're facing. Rather than proclaiming, "Blessed are *they* who possess certain virtues or who engage in certain righteous activities," every beatitude in this passage begins with, "Blessed are *you* who find yourself struggling in this way or that way." So, it appears that Jesus is offering this teaching not as a general instruction about the Christian life, but as a pastoral message to his disciples, to reassure them of God's care and concern for them during difficult times.

Another major difference is that Luke has only *four* Beatitudes, which describe four types of suffering. There is no mention of any virtues, such as those who are single-hearted, or merciful, or hungering and thirsting for righteousness, or engaged in peacemaking. Furthermore, each type of suffering mentioned in these Beatitudes is perfectly balanced by its opposite in the *woes* which follow. To declare, "Woe to you," is a biblical way of warning people that a terrible fate awaits them. So, in effect, the people who are suffering are declared blessed, while those who are prospering are declared cursed:

"Blessed are you who are poor; woe to you who are rich."

"Blessed are you who are now hungry; woe to you who are filled now."

"Blessed are you who are now weeping; woe to you who laugh now."

"Blessed are you when people hate, insult and denounce you because of me; woe to you when all speak well of you."

What is going on here? Jesus seems to be turning conventional wisdom on its head. Just ask anyone which group of people they would consider more blessed – those who are rich, satisfied, laughing and respected, or those who are poor, hungry, weeping and persecuted. The answer seems quite obvious. But, according to Jesus, our conventional wisdom is all backwards. It is incorrect to assume that prosperity and happiness imply God's favor and approval. We may envy the lives of the rich and famous, but Jesus issues a stern warning to them: "Enjoy yourself now, because you're going to suffer later." Meanwhile, he promises those who are struggling under life's burdens that they will eventually find the relief and

prosperity which elude them now. It's not clear whether that comfort will come only in the next life, or whether their fortunes will begin to turn here in this life. What *is* certain, though, is that Jesus means for these blessings and woes to apply *right now*, in the present moment. Those who are suffering now should recognize that they are, in fact, *blessed*. And those who are enjoying their carefree life now should beware that their happiness will come to an end.

This is all quite puzzling, until we recall the words of the Prophet Jeremiah in today's first reading: "Blessed is the one who *trusts in the Lord*," and, "Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings." Notice, Jeremiah says nothing about the material conditions of a person's life – whether he is poor or rich, hungry or satisfied, weeping or laughing, hated or esteemed. What determines whether we are blessed or cursed is *where we put our trust*. Those whose lives are *hard* tend to put their trust in the Lord more than in themselves or in other human beings, for the simple reason that they have no other choice. When people of faith are beaten down by life and have nowhere else to turn, they instinctively (and sometimes, desperately) turn to the Lord for comfort and consolation. They are blessed, even while their lives remain painful and bleak, because their affliction drives them into the arms of a loving and merciful God. On the other hand, when people are living the dream, feeling on top of the world, enjoying all that life has to offer, they tend *not* to lean on God, for they see no need to do so. When everything appears to be under control and going well, *even people of faith* can quite literally forget about God. When they do, *woe to them*, for they are cursed.

So, what we have in these readings is not an exhortation to *behave* in a certain way, but to *hope* in a certain way. Both Jesus and Jeremiah are warning us not to rest our hopes on our ability to achieve material success or to control the circumstances of our lives. Rather, our hope should be grounded in God's promise to accompany and sustain us through any trials that might come our way, even when we struggle against forces beyond our control. That sort of hope affects how we respond to times of adversity *and* times of prosperity.

When times are tough, people of faith are quick to call out, "Lord, help me." But, that instinctive reaction alone does not constitute a blessing. If what we mean by that plaintive cry is simply, "Lord, fix my problems for me," or, "Please, do as I ask," then we're not really putting our full trust in the Lord. To hope in the Lord means to put ourselves in God's hands *without reservation*, to turn over our will to God's will, and to rely on God to do whatever is best. When we really find ourselves in over our heads, reaching out in desperation for divine assistance, we typically don't even know what is best. So, we should not presume to tell God what to do. That's just another way of trying to control our own circumstances, rather than asking God to take charge. If our hope rests in God's judgment and God's mercy, then we will be more willing to say, "Lord, I need your help; *please take it from here*." Then we will be blessed, no matter what happens.

In good times, people of faith should be moved to gratitude. Rather than congratulating ourselves for a job well done, we should give thanks *to the Lord* for our successes and achievements. We should also strive to share our good fortune with others. The woes uttered by Jesus are intended for those who are self-satisfied and self-absorbed. The way we can turn those curses into blessings is by being mindful of those who are not flourishing as we are. We can pray for them and reach out to them, to try to make *their* lives better. In so doing, we show that our hope for them and for ourselves *rests in God*, not in human beings.