

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year C: Jer 17:5-8; Ps 1; 1Cor 15:12, 16-20; Lk 6:17, 20-26
February 13, 2022
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The Beatitudes, that we just heard in the Gospel, are not always easy to understand. To many, they sound counterintuitive. “*Blessed are you who are poor Blessed are you who are now hungry Blessed are you who are now weeping Blessed are you when people hate you ... on account of the Son of Man.*” To most of us, these don’t sound like great blessings. They sound more like great sufferings – things to be avoided. But Jesus famously announced that these things, like poverty and hunger and sorrow and persecution, are, in fact, blessings, because they lead to great joys in the future.

So, whenever we hear the Beatitudes, which are a popular summary of the Christian life and faith, we should remember that Jesus said it’s a blessing to be poor and hungry and sad, *not* because suffering is fun or pleasant, but because it leads to something glorious later. As Christ said, when we experience the sufferings of this life: “*Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.*”

The Beatitudes challenge us to see our lives here on earth from the perspective of heaven and eternity. They challenge us to admit that the goods of this life are transitory and passing, while the goods of the next life are lasting and eternal. The goal for us, while we live here in this life, is to keep our eyes fixed on the heavenly rewards to come. As St. Paul said, “*If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory*” (Col 3:1-4). And as Christ said, “[S]tore up [for yourselves] treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Mt 6:19-20).

There’s no question that there are sorrows in this life for those who follow Christ. We do, in fact, experience a certain poverty by not pursuing all material comforts; we do, in fact, experience certain sorrows, especially when we must lament certain evils in the world; and we do, in fact, experience certain scorn and hatred and persecution for defending the truth that Christ taught us when it is abandoned by our society and culture. Perhaps some Christians imagine at times

how much more pleasant life would be, if they did *not* follow the teachings of Christ. G.K. Chesterton said that for the person who lives *without* faith in Christ, there are many little joys but one great overriding sorrow, since there is no hope for eternal life; but for the person who lives *with* faith in Christ, there are many little sorrows and one great overriding joy (cf. Kreeft, *Food for the Soul: Cycle C*, 403). The little sorrows in the Christian life are the sufferings and sacrifices we endure. But the great overriding joy is the hope for eternal life, where there will be no more suffering and no more pain. The contemporary Christian singer Jeremy Camp captured this truth well in his beautiful song “There Will Be a Day,” which I recommend for your listening: “There will be a day with no more tears, no more pain, no more fears, when the burdens of this place will be no more; [when] we’ll see Jesus face to face.”

If we find ourselves focusing on the trials and sufferings of life, we should remember that God has a plan for allowing them. Professor Peter Kreeft explains: “The only reason God lets us suffer here – the only reason a God who loves us totally and has total power over the world and total wisdom to know what is best and to know the future, and allows us to suffer poverty and hunger and sorrow and hate in this life – is that out of these evils he will bring a far greater good. He promises us that ‘all things work for good for those who love God’ (Rom 8:28). Not all things are good, but all things work together for good [for those who love God]” (*Food for the Soul: Cycle C*, 405).

But, in order for us to live the Beatitudes, in order for the sufferings of life to become blessings for us, we have to endure them with faith and trust that they are leading to something great in the future. When we experience the sufferings of the Beatitudes – whether it’s poverty, or sorrow, or hatred – we need to remember that they are blessings only if we put our trust in the Lord. As we heard the Prophet Jeremiah say in the first reading: “*Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.*”

As Christians, we know our hope is not for this life only. St. Paul put it pretty bluntly in the second reading: “*If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all*” (1Cor 15:19). No, our hope is for Heaven, where there is eternal life and eternal joy. So, if the trials of the Beatitudes come, we should remember that the sorrows of this life are passing, but the joys they lead to are eternal.