

Commentary on the Gospel: "A poem of divine love"

Gospel for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C) and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 6:17.20-26*)

And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon.

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

“Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.

“Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

“But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger.

“Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

“Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

Commentary

The gospel for this Sunday presents us with one of the most surprising and significant passages from Jesus’ preaching; the beatitudes, with their paradoxical language, teach us what the true happiness is that all men and women are seeking. Saint Josemaria described them as “a poem of divine love.”^[1] In fact, as Pope Francis explains, “the beatitudes are the portrait of Jesus, his way of life; and they are the path to true happiness, which we too can travel with the grace that Jesus gives us.”^[2] Luke describes the Master standing on a level place and preaching with kingly authority. We can imagine

ourselves immersed in that great crowd, and hearing his words as addressed to us.

“Blessed are the poor.” For a Christian, poverty is not something optional; without it we are neither a disciple nor truly happy. We all have to live it as the Master did. And to live poverty in the middle of the world, Saint Josemaria recommended: “I would advise you to be sparing with yourself while being very generous towards others. Avoid unnecessary expenditure on luxuries and comforts, whether out of caprice, or vanity, etc. Don’t create needs for yourself.”^[3] Faced with widespread consumerism around us, we need to frequently reflect on whether we are detached from the material things we use; whether we “travel light” so we can follow Jesus closely and begin to possess “the Kingdom of God.” If we live poverty well we will also learn how to look

out for others with generosity, especially the poor and those in greater need, who we will never look on with indifference.

“Blessed are you that hunger now.” Amid the opulence of the rich and satiated, there is no room for God and others. In contrast, those who live sparingly and temperately begin to “be satiated” by God. It is a question of enjoying earthly goods with gratitude, but in a way that leads us to desire spiritual goods. This beatitude also invites us to live with trust in divine providence. While striving to earn what we need to sustain our life, we are serene about possible shortfalls, since God never abandons his children.

Jesus also tells us that those who weep now are blessed, because in the future they will laugh. When Christians strive to imitate the Master, “they experience the

intimate tie between the cross and resurrection,”^[4] as Benedict XVI wrote. United to Christ, we attain the strength needed to transform suffering into redemptive love. We share in the joy our Lord experienced even amid his Passion, since through it He was attaining for us the gift of the Holy Spirit and opening to us the gates of Heaven. With this hope and consolation, Christians also become consolation for others; they “are unafraid to share in the suffering of others; they do not flee from painful situations.”^[5]

Finally, Jesus calls blessed those who suffer persecution and rejection for his sake. Our consistent example as ordinary Christians can shock or annoy others. But we need to be courageous in order to reflect with our conduct the lovable Face of Jesus that every person is seeking. Here we can follow Saint Peter’s advice to the first Christians: “But even if you do

suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (*1 Pet 3:14-16*).

In summary, and in opposition to what might seem to be the case, our happiness is not based on possessing unlimited material goods; nor on attaining at all costs other people's approval. Rather happiness comes from our identification with Christ.

^[1] Saint Josemaria, Notes from a meditation, 25 December 1972, (AGP, P09, p. 186).

^[2] Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 6 August 2014.

^[3] Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, 123.

^[4] Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 100.

^[5] Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 76.

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