

17th February 2019 (Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Jeremiah 17:5-8; Psalm 1:1-4,6; 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20; Luke 6:23ab.

Blessed are you ... yours is the kingdom of God!

I am not sure, as we once again read the famous beatitudes, whether familiarity with this text has made us immune to what Jesus is proclaiming here. The original Greek word used, makarios (μακάριος), is very poorly translated by the word 'happy' offered us by the Jerusalem Bible translation. The concept being expressed by Jesus is much bigger than just a simple happiness. Other more recent translations offer us the word 'blessed.' The people Jesus calls 'makarios' should indeed be happy because they are the object of God's grace; they are graced by God. (Happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous — with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favour and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions.)

The people who Jesus calls 'makarios' are ones who we would normally feel sorry for, people living in poverty, hungry, grieving, rejected by society and persecuted! There is certainly no benefit in being materially poor, hungry or grieving, but God reaches out to those who are rejected by the rest of society and covers them in a special way with his grace. Those whom society rejects, are first in line to receive God's attention.

We are not poor, hungry, grieving or persecuted, so what does this gospel tell us today? We thank God daily that we live a fairly peaceful life; so, should we be condemned for this, or should we start living in the streets? The first reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah explains the background to the beatitudes. The prophet declares blessed those who place their trust only in God, because they are like a tree with its roots constantly fed by running water, and has nothing to fear in a time of drought. People who put their trust in others are cursed, because as soon as their fortunes change, they will be abandoned by their admirers.

People who are poor, hungry, mourning or persecuted, know that very often they have no one to turn to for help; their only help comes from God and therefore look forward to God's consolation. People who are happy, wealthy, full and popular, often get their satisfaction from people around them and have no need to place their trust in God.

Jesus invites us to imitate the poor and the hungry of this world. He invites us to set aside our own securities and place all our trust only in God. Those who have had their satisfaction now, will not enjoy the happiness of God's kingdom because they have not learnt to look at and trust in God. The poor have learnt how to look up at God and hence will be graced by him. We need to have an attitude of people who are always lacking and searching, so that we can make space for God in our life.

Fr Mario