

Sunday Readings

the Year of Luke



*Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:
"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours
is the kingdom of GOD" (Lk. 6:20)*

6th Sunday Ordinary Time
Sunday 17th February 2019

notes

1. The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

2. **Cover image:** 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C – image from Missionaries of Sacred Heart, Peru.

3. **Lectio Divina:** reading GOD's WORD in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us:

*"In the presence of GOD, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: 'LORD, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this?' Or perhaps: 'What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this Word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?'"*¹

The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. For the purpose of this booklet, we suggest using the gospel reading of the up-coming Sunday.

There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order:

lectio (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down.

meditatio (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in GOD's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words.

oratio (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it.

contemplatio (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation.

This booklet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'*.²

4. **Review of the Week** – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.

1 From paragraph 153 *The Joy of the Gospel* (Evangelii Gaudium) – Pope Francis (2013)

2 Mt.18:20

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the sermon on the plain

introduction

Today's gospel presents the beginning of *the sermon on the plain* (cf. Lk.6:17ff).³ Jesus came down from the mountain where he had spent the night in prayer and he meets, "a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people." What Jesus is about to tell them does not apply to a select few, but to "all who had come to hear him and to be healed." "He looked up at his disciples," directly addressing them as 'you'; namely, all the people in front of him and he proclaims the four beatitudes to the poor who are hungry now and who are hated and persecuted on account of *the Son of man*.

first reading: Jeremiah 17: 5 – 8

[Judah's sin and punishment]

Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD.(5) They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.(6) Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.(7) They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.(8)

Jeremiah's vitality comes from his passionate conviction about the power of the LORD to work a newness in times of loss and exile. Jeremiah lived in a time of great turmoil. He believed it was the time of dying: for a culture; a society; and a tradition. What pained the prophet most, was the failure of his contemporaries to notice or care about this ending. Yet he goes on believing that the LORD can do an utterly new thing and violate what has become conventional thinking.

The prophet affirms his trust in the workings of the LORD. Its within GOD's capacity to bring newness out of nothing. For that reason, loss and emptiness are not the last word. Against those who thought the world was closed to newness, he charges that they put their trust in the wrong place (vv.5-8). The prophetic trust is that, "*the LORD brings a new world into being,*" in the midst of the ruin and rubble of the old world. Jeremiah affirms that none other but the LORD has the freedom, power or authority,

³ In Matthew, *the Sermon on the Mount* (Mt.5:1ff)

to cause a new world to be. Such a world would not exist until freshly given by GOD's speech and action. So the drift of Jeremiah's message to anyone who cares to listen is, that there will be new building and planting precisely where there was no prospect for any such thing in the old failed world.

The tradition of Jeremiah concerns a new covenant. The new covenant is both like and unlike the old covenant (*Jer.31:31-34*). The LORD does not work as a human. Therefore GOD's capacity for newness does not fit human categories or definitions of the possible. The prophet's task is to voice the passion of GOD – to speak in such ways of passion that the words will not be co-opted. Jeremiah's is the voice of those who have given up on the old consensus and who know that the LORD has promised much more than has been given. He invites the listening Israelites to entertain new dimensions of social possibility that they had never considered before.

response: Psalm 1 : 1 – 4, 6⁴

[the two ways]

*Happy are those who do not follow
the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;(1)
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.(2)
They are like trees planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.(3)
The wicked are not so, but are like chaff
that the wind drives away.(4) . . . ,
for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.(6)*

This *song of Torah* announces that the agenda for Israelite worship is obedience.⁵ That obedience is required in the conduct of life in accordance with the LORD's purpose and ordering for creation. The fundamental contrast is

4 *Psalm 1* – is a preface to the whole *Book of Psalms*, contrasting the destiny of the good and the wicked. The psalmist views life as activity – as choosing either the good or the bad. Each *path* brings its inevitable consequences: the wise through their good actions will experience rootedness and life, and the wicked, rootlessness and death.

5 [v.2] *The law of the LORD*: Either *the Torah*, the first five books of the Bible, or, more probably, divine teaching or instruction.

between the righteous and wicked; between the innocent and guilty; between those who conform to GOD's purpose and those who ignore those purposes and disrupt good order.

The psalmist affirms that life is like the hymn, organised as a sharp *either/or*. Either, be a happy person enjoying Torah obedience and avoid all alternative enterprises (vv.1-2), or be like the wicked, who refuse such delight (v.4); either, end up like a luxuriant tree with plenty of nourishment (v.3), or be like the chaff which disappears (v.4). Life consists of such choices, which are fairly clear (vv.5-6). There will be a judgement, and a person can stand or fall, but either way, it will be on GOD's terms. This connection between devotion and destiny isn't negotiable. The psalmist speaks for a community that appreciates the giftedness of GOD's world. Such a community has confidence that *the Torah* is the only thinkable response to the givenness of creation.

second reading: 1 Corinthians 15 : 12, 16 – 20

[The resurrection of the dead]

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?(12) . . . , For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.(16) If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.(17) Then those also who have died in Christ have perished.(18) If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (19) But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.(20)

Paul's point is, that if would-be believers hold that there is no resurrection from the dead, they must be consistent and deny Christ's resurrection. By rejecting the one resurrection while holding to the other, they're inconsistent. Paul's argument about the resurrection of the dead is not with outsiders but with some of his fellow Christians. It could be an example of what happens when would-be disciples lose sight of the link between Jesus' resurrection and the type of life Jesus lived. The apostle tries to clarify that link for the Corinthians.

The apocalyptic tradition had the notion of general resurrection,⁶ which became an element in the beliefs of such groups as the Pharisees. Paul argues that the rejection of resurrection of the dead, as held in apocalyptic belief, would invalidate the message about Jesus as *the Risen LORD*. The issue is about the effectiveness of GOD's divine power for life and love. It is precisely because GOD, who is *Truth* and *Love*, surpasses in power, any sway death might have over creation, that it is possible to affirm the resurrection of Christ and to speak of hope.

6 Cf. *Dn.12*

Popular understanding had come to think that it was Jesus who raised himself from the dead – and it was Jesus who delivered to GOD the victory of resurrection. Paul states the reverse of that: *"He was raised"* (v.4) or *"proclaimed as raised"* (v.12). Its the LORD's *'power-for-life-giving'* that carries people through death. The LORD has made the promise of general resurrection and has kept that promise in Jesus' resurrection. According to the apostle, that's the reality in proclaiming Jesus' victory over death, as the *'first fruits'* of his resurrection: i.e. the portion of the harvest offered in thanksgiving to GOD implies the consecration of the entire harvest to come (v.20). Christ's resurrection is not an end in itself; its finality lies in the whole harvest, ourselves.

gospel reading: Luke 6 : 17, 20 – 26

[Jesus' teaching – blessings and woes]

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, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.(17) . . .

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,

for yours is the kingdom of GOD.(20)

Blessed are you who are hungry now,

for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now,

for you will laugh.(21)

Blessed are you when people hate you,

and when they exclude you, revile you,

and defame you on account of the Son of Man.(22)

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy,

for surely your reward is great in heaven;

for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.(23)

But woe to you who are rich,

for you have received your consolation.(24)

Woe to you who are full now,

for you will be hungry.

Woe to you who are laughing now,

for you will mourn and weep.(25)

Woe to you when all speak well of you,

for that is what their ancestors did

to the false prophets."(26)

'Blessedness' implies having made a break with the dominant social code. The *happiness* that is the result of the suppression of the relationships of power in a society of classes where market-values destroy the use of things and human reciprocity. The establishment of relationships of non-power; or non-value; or

non-fetishism, avoid violence and death better than magic rites. That is happiness here on Earth. And the end of the world and of history will prove that this happiness is eternal.

Luke doesn't talk about *'the poor in Spirit'* or, *'hungering after justice'* (cf. *Mt.5:2-6*). He is more concerned with the experience of the poor, the hungry and those who suffer. Genuine people have a deep dissatisfaction with present social order. Little reason to defend the present arrangements of power. That gives such ones an openness to the new order which Jesus brings. The powerful, who direct the established order, can't bear such sedition. They will persecute and revile those who work for the coming of GOD's reigning (*vv.24-25*).⁷

In Christ's eyes it was bad that all should speak well of would-be disciples (*v.26*). The gospel says that is what happened with false prophets. False prophets regularly appear alongside true prophets. They're usually on the payroll of the royal house. They are the ones who defend the policies of the ruler; who soothe the consciences of the rich; and lead people astray. They were opposed to any announcement of change. They prophesy that nothing will happen – that the *status quo* will be maintained or as *Isaiah* says; their message was: *"Tomorrow will be just like today."* It is interesting what Jesus says about such false prophets; that all will speak well of them. Everybody, including those who wrote the history, have been on the side of the system of exploitation. Christ says, *"Woe to those on the side of power and for the status quo!"*

items for sharing:

- *Those who trust in human power are like barren bushes wasting in a desert place. Those who trust in GOD are like trees flourishing beside an hospitable stream even during the dry season. Comment on **Jeremiah 17: 5 – 8***
- *Paul's argues that those believers who hold there is no resurrection from the dead are inconsistent. Comment on **1 Corinthians 15: 12, 16 – 20***
- *The resurrection is not simply a statement about the power of GOD. It also speaks of the potential for integrity in humankind. When the Father raises Jesus from the dead, it shows what GOD thought of the human life Jesus had lived. Comment on **Luke 6: 17, 20 – 26***

⁷ It seems that the reason the rich and powerful are going to be punished is because they are rich and because they have already had their joy. They are not charged with having been evil rich people!

prayer:

*O GOD,
who alone can satisfy our deepest hungers,
protect us from the lure of wealth and power;
move our hearts to seek first your kingdom,
that ours may be the security and joy
of those who place their trust in you.
We make our prayer
through our LORD Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
GOD for ever and ever. Amen*

review of the week:

We have every right to work for success and well-being. But Jesus condemns those who have set their hopes on what is the established order - the world of the rich, the sated, and those whose lives are taken up with the pursuit of human happiness. Jesus puts such people in the same company as false prophets.

How do we rate ourselves? What are my ultimate pursuits? Is working for success and well-being my final objective in my life? How do I judge myself and others: by wealth and human success? Is there not some other order, where the measure is the loving gift of self in love, as a disciple of Jesus, who gave himself for us?

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