**SIXTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME IN YEAR C**

**13th February 2022**

**First Reading Jeremiah 17:5-8**

We have two complementary themes today to express our trust in the Lord. Torah (Moses’ Law) and Wisdom

Jeremiah gives us a snatch of wisdom poetry contrasting the wicked (those who trust in humans) and the righteous (those who trust in God). A barren desert shrub is contrasted with a fruitful tree beside a flowing river. Jeremiah’s words reflect the common naive cliches of traditional Judaism. To rely on weak human nature, on the flesh and the things of the flesh as the Bible puts it, can only mean spiritual death. To trust in God means to rely on God, to turn to him as to the one source of life.

Those who trust in God are the poor, whom Jesus, in today's gospel reading, declares blessed. This is an application to the individual of the prophets' message that when the people abandoned the Lord and put their trust in armies and alliances their cause was lost. It was generally the experience of Israel's history that the more kings and people turned to human means, the less they did in fact experience their need of God.

**Responsorial Psalm: 1:1-4 & 6**

This psalm is an obvious choice to go with the poem from Jeremiah because it uses precisely the same comparison as the second stanza of the poem: the person who hopes in the Lord is like a tree planted by streams of water. In the third stanza of the psalm, however, the wicked are compared to chaff, not to a shrub in the desert, as in the poem.

But there is a far more significant difference between the psalm and the poem from Jeremiah. The psalm (first stanza) emphasizes the Torah (law) as the ground of human trust in Yahweh, while Jeremiah says nothing at all about this. This shows that the psalm was written from a later, postexilic perspective than the wisdom poem.

**Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:12.16-20**

Last week in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Paul had insisted on the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In today's passage he brings out the meaning of it for Christians.

Some of the Corinthians, following common Greek ideas distinguished between the body and the soul, rather than accepting the Hebrew view of a human being as an integral being. Some of them therefore imagined the resurrection as discarding the body at death and achieving liberation in a spiritual world.

Paul's argument is that if there is no resurrection from the dead (v. 12) it follows that Christ has not been raised (vv. 13, 16); Paul's preaching is in vain (v. 14) and he has been misrepresenting God (v. 15); the faith of the Corinthians is meaningless (vv. 14, 17) and they are still in their sins (v. 17); those who died in hope of resurrection have perished without hope (v. 18). He had already demonstrated (vv. 1-11) that the first conclusion (Christ has not been raised) is false - and so their whole argument collapses.

On the one hand, Christ's resurrection depends upon the validity of the Jewish apocalyptic hope, for to say that Christ has been raised from the dead makes sense only if we grant the validity of that hope (v. 16). Christ's resurrection is not an episode in his own individual life-story but the first of the resurrections from the dead for which the apocalyptists had hoped and the one that determines all later resurrections. He is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (v. 20), and conversely, since he is the first fruits, the others will also follow because of his resurrection.

**Gospel Luke 6:17 & 20-26**

Following the Babylonian Exile and the destruction of the Temple, the Law achieved a greater prominence in Judaism. So, the importance of the Rabbi rose and that of the priest correspondingly declined.

Some Rabbis achieved reputations for wise sayings which encapsulated their ideas and Matthew and Luke both present the Beatitudes as those of Jesus. It is highly significant, however, that both versions have been amended. This was presumedly to make them easier to understand or accept but incidentally demonstrates that the editing was early enough to avoid the bibliolatry that followed.

The Gospel reading is Luke’s version of the Beatitudes. The word ‘Beatitude’ means ‘fortunate’ and was traditionally applied to a person who conformed to the expected behaviour of the devout Jew. He was justly rewarded with prosperity, children and longevity.

The Beatitude was a conventional form of Rabbinic teaching but Jesus, typically, challenges accepted thinking. Both versions certainly originated in some sayings of Jesus but which have been used differently by Matthew and Luke. We used Matthew’s version last All Saints’ Day. It is not certain but Luke’s version is probably closer to Jesus’ original words which we can reconstruct as .........

Blessed are the poor, for the Kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Blessed are those who hunger, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the afflicted, for they will be comforted.

These sayings are Hebrew poetry. Each line repeats the previous one but with different words. They do not refer to three separate categories but to three aspects of the same distressful situation.

In his version, Luke has added a fourth (6;22-23) to acknowledge the new situation of martyrdom. (Note how the fourth is not with the third, but begins a new paragraph in the Sunday Missal. This could mean that it was added after Luke’s lifetime) He also added four ‘woes’ which simply reversed the positive elements into negative ones (Luke 6;24-26)

Christianity in the Roman Empire appealed largely to the working class, though all classes were represented to some degree, even in Caesar’s household. (Philippians 4;22) Conversely, the rich and powerful were largely associated with privilege and injustice, with honourable exceptions. (John 19;38-42)

So when they heard these words, at their weekly Eucharist, Christians would see themselves as among the poor, yet having the inestimable riches of the knowledge of God and membership of the Kingdom. Outsiders, however, despite their material assets were not privy to the innermost secrets of the universe.

Jesus has spoken to the poor as such, the afflicted and the hungry; their very distress being enough to make them privileged before God.

Luke has applied these promises to his readers with the manifest desire of supporting them in their own painful situation. Whatever Jesus’ original audience, the Beatitudes in the Gospel are now addressed to poor Christians. The promised blessedness will wonderfully compensate them for their present privations. But they ultimately owe their blessedness to their status as disciples of Christ.

But, we must also not overlook one of Luke’s motives in writing his Gospel, which was to appeal to a more sophisticated class of people than would have been persuaded by that of Mark.

Although the Beatitudes are directed at the poor, the Gospel is directed at the educated. Luke is writing for the rich and the respected. That is to say, he wants to motivate them towards a conversion in keeping with the social message of Jesus. If he is the 'evangelist of the rich', his message is a challenge- and although he is an exceptionally keen critic of the rich, he does envisage their conversion.