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6th Sunday in Ordinary Time - 13 February 2022

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13 February 2022

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Anthony Doran

Introduction

Easy or hard. Light or dark. Good or bad. There are always two ways. Do we follow the harder path of righteousness? Or the seemingly easier path of wickedness? Today's readings offer us meditations on the blessing of following the path of righteousness.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came to draw us into the life of God.
Lord, have mercy.

You came so that we can all be truly happy.
Christ, have mercy.

You bring us to new life.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

*O God, who teach us that you abide
in hearts that are just and true,
grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace
as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.*

It is not too surprising to find that our prayer first served as a collect for the feast of the Ascension. This original setting brings to the fore the deep biblical resonances that are at the core of the oration. The use of 'abide' is a clear reference back to the Gospel of John (Jn 6:57, Jn 15:5-7), and expresses God's promise to remain in the heart of believers. Abiding in God's love involves keeping the commandments, inclusive of sharing with the poor: 'but if anyone has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need, how does God's love abide in that person' (1 Jn 3:17). The language of God's indwelling is taken from St Paul. It designates Christ's presence by faith (Eph 3:17), the presence of the Spirit (Rom 8:8-9), the presence of Christ's word (Col 3:11) and power (2 Cor 12:9). By contrast, without Christ, sin dwells in the

inner depths of the human person (Rom 7:17-19). Rather, the people in whom God abides are characterised by hearts that are just and true. Yet their right deeds are only in harmony with God's will on account of the fashioning of divine grace. The prayer exemplifies the community's faith in the power of God's word, which teaches that God will abide and brings this about.

First Reading

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Today's first reading sounds as if it should come from the Book of Wisdom or the Book of Proverbs. It is a collection of sayings which seeks to contrast the fate of those who trust in the Lord with those who trust in human beings or their wealth.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 1:1-4 & Ps 39:5

Happy are they who hope in the Lord.

Picking up on the themes of today's First Reading, the very first psalm also contrasts the two ways: the way of the Lord and the way of sinners.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Today's reading continues Paul's meditation on the reality of the resurrection of the dead. If Christ has been raised – and he has – then we too can be assured of our own resurrection.

Gospel Reading

Luke 6:17, 20-26

Much less famous than Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (and much less quoted) is Luke's Sermon on the Plain which we hear the opening verses of in today's Gospel. For each of the beatitude sayings, there is a corresponding 'cursitude'.

Reflection

Of all those European writers who have written about Australia and its landscape, it is hard to escape the profound influence which I think Dorothea Mackellar has had on the national psyche with her poem *My Country*, especially its mention in the same line, in apparent contradistinction 'droughts and flooding rains'. It seems that, at

times, we see and experience drought at the same time as flood. Our news can be full of bushfire in the southern part of Australia, while our Northern sisters and brothers live through torrential rain and flood, destroying livestock and farming land.

And yet, while some have had to deal with torrential floods, much of Australia has had the contrast of living through several years of drought.

There has not been enough rain to fill our reservoirs, or sustain many of our gardens. In search of water, trees have been sending their roots down further and further into the earth. And as these trees send their roots further and further in search of water, they have damaged the earth around them. Footpaths are lifted-up and cracked. Foundations are destroyed. And, if you are a gardener, you will know how difficult it has been to try to nurse a favourite plant through drought. How a frequent, shallow, surface watering is just no good. What is necessary is the occasional deep, deep soaking. Allowing water to penetrate the parched earth and get to those thirsty roots.

These images, so familiar to us from our drought, are used by Jeremiah in today's first reading. And Jeremiah uses them as a metaphor to contrast the one who puts their trust in human things, and the one who puts their trust in the Lord. For Jeremiah, the one who relies on things of flesh, whose heart is turned from the Lord is like the dry scrub in the wastelands. The person who relies on human things becomes no better than the parched places of the wilderness, a salt land, uninhabited. There is no life in the wilderness. It is empty, lifeless, desolate.

In contrast is the one who puts his trust in the Lord. For to live, trusting in the Lord, is to be 'like the tree by the waterside that thrusts its roots to the stream.' In the heat of the day, this tree is safe. It has green leaves, and 'never ceases to bear fruit.' It is full, alive, fruitful.

Full and alive is the Christ preached by St Paul in the second reading. In this part of the First Letter to the Corinthians, St Paul is answering questions that seem to have arisen in the Church community at Corinth. As we can gather from our reading today, some had doubted the resurrection of the dead. No one doubted that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. Only, it seems, did some of them doubt that the resurrection of Jesus means that we, too, are raised from the dead. Paul is quite consistent and constant in his preaching. As St Paul told us in last week's second reading: 'I taught you what I had been taught myself, namely that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried; and that he was raised to life on the third day.' (1 Cor 15:3-4). There is no doubt that Christ has been raised from the dead. And if he has been raised from the dead, then all of us are raised from the dead, because Christ is 'the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep.' In some ways, the contrast from the first reading is continued. 'Happy is the one who believes in the resurrection of Christ from the dead...cursed is the one who does not believe.'

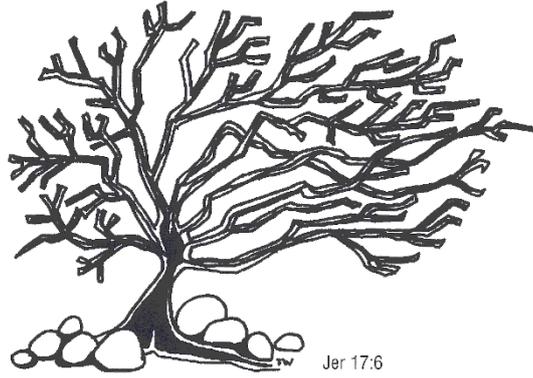
Today's Gospel Reading continues the series of contrasts in our readings for this Sunday. And this series of contrasts is continued in Luke's version of the Beatitudes. We are much more familiar with the version of the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel. Luke's version is not only shorter, but also, for the four Beatitudes, there are four

Woes. For the four phrases which begin 'How happy are you...' there are four phrases which begin 'Alas for you...' or 'Woe to you...'

The word 'Happy' in this Reading needs a bit of explaining. 'Happy' is used here not in the sense of moral happiness. In other words, the person who is meant to be happy because they are hungry is not happy in the ordinary sense of the word. After all, who could be happy when they are hungry? Or poor? Or weeping? Rather, they are happy or blessed because of the coming action of God. And the coming action of God is to bring life from death in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And so, the one who is poor, or hungry, or who weeps, or who is hated is happy or blessed because of what God is about to show in their life. In this sense, these Beatitudes are highly provocative. For, holding together two contrasting ideas, they proclaim that true happiness or blessedness in the Kingdom of God lies in God turning the world upside down. For those who are rich now, those who are satisfied now, those who are laughing now, those who are liked by the world now will not be the winners in the Kingdom.

In the coming Kingdom of God, the wisdom of the world is turned upside down. In the coming Kingdom of God, the vision of Jesus Christ is different to the vision of this world. And this is one of the constant themes of Luke's Gospel which we will read in the course of this liturgical year. We see it in the *Magnificat* of Mary where the mighty are cast from their thrones and the hungry are fed with good things. We see this in the synagogue of Nazareth when Jesus proclaims good news for the poor, and liberty for captives, and new sight for the blind.

What these Beatitudes depict is a situation of extreme vulnerability. According to what the world values – those situations which the Woes address – it makes little sense to be this vulnerable. Yet, in light of what God is about to do, it makes very good sense indeed. Because to be vulnerable gives scope and space to God's power. To be full of what the world values is to leave little space for God to fill. To be small in this world gives space for the power and glory of God to shine out. To hang on the Cross, dying the death of a criminal, is for us, life and indeed, the ultimate glory of God. A vulnerable community becomes the place where God is made welcome, and where others see that God is present. And so, blessed are we when we put our trust in the Lord, and send our roots not into the parched earth of this world, but rather into the stream of God's power and grace and glory.



Jer 17:6

***THOSE WHOSE HEARTS TURN FROM GOD
ARE LIKE A SHRUB IN THE DESERT.***

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

In today's psalm we are called to be happy and hope in the Lord. Therefore, as one people of a loving God who sent his Son for us, we offer the needs of our community.

Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and the leaders in our Church that they may be worthy instruments in your hands to lead your people on the journey to the Synod of 2023.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all political and religious leaders that they may be single-minded in working for the greater good of the people they serve as we cope with climate change and the pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the homeless and abandoned people in our world, that they may know God's healing through those who care them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have lost faith in God and humanity, that they may be touched by your healing grace.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all our family members and parishioners who grieve for loved ones who have died in other countries from COVID-19. May they be comforted through the care of those around them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the community gathered here to become the Body of Christ. May we go forth today renewed so that we can witness to all we meet that Christ is the centre of our existence.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

There are many needs in our world today and we know that God will grant these our petitions and the unspoken ones in our hearts, which we make in the name of Jesus your Son, through the power of the Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

Amazing grace. J. Newton. 437
Eye has not seen. M. Haugen. 466
Forth in the peace of Christ we go. J. Quinn SJ/O. Gibbons. 495
O breathe on me, O breath of God. E. Hatch/ Traditional Irish Melody. 432
O God, our help in ages past. I. Watts/ W. Croft. 459
Seed, scattered and sown. D. Feiten. 195
Seek, O seek the Lord. J. P. McAuley/R. Connolly. 211
The Beatitudes. P. Kearney. 489

AOV 1

Amazing grace. J. Newton. 29
Be thou my vision. E. Hull/Traditional Irish Melody. 9
Eye has not seen. M. Haugen. 146
O God, our help in ages past. I. Watts/ W. Croft. 175

AOVK

A child's prayer. D. Halloran. 111
We are children of the living God. K. Sherman CSJ. 15

CWB

The Beatitudes. Peter Kearney. 817

CWBII

Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions
We know that Christ is raised. John Brownlow Geyer. 343
Firmly I believe and truly. John Henry Newman. 486
Seek, O seek the Lord. James Phillip McAuley. 595
You walk along our shoreline. Sylvia Dunstan. 653
Additional selection by Chris deSilva
The Beatitudes. Peter Kearney. 456

S&S1

Lead me, Lord. John D. Becker. 107
We are the light of the world. Jean Anthony Greif. 143

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 1: *Happy are they who hope in the Lord.*
Psalm 1: Robert J. Thompson/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB 366
Psalm 1: Jenny O'Brien. JOBC pg. 64
Blessed are they who hope in the Lord. LPC Tony Alonso pg. 98

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Heaven shall be yours (TCS) *Beatitudes* [Communion]