

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C



FIRST READING
Jeremiah 17:5–8

PSALM
Psalm 1:1–4, 6

SECOND READING
1 Corinthians 15:12, 16–20

GOSPEL
Luke 6:17, 20–26

*Scripture quotations from
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PRAYER

Psalm 1:1–4, 6

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;
but their delight
is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate
day and night.
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.
The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff
that the wind drives away.
for the LORD watches over the way
of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

READING THE WORD

First Reading Jeremiah 17:5–8

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.
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.
Blessed are those
who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
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.

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16–20

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

Gospel Luke 6:17, 20–26

Jesus came down with his twelve
disciples 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.
Then he looked up at his disciples
and said:
“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.
“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.
“Blessed are you when people hate you,
and when they exclude you,
revile you,
and defame you
on account of the Son of Man.
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.
“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
“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.
“Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for that is what their ancestors did
to the false prophets.

HEARING THE WORD

“Looking far Ahead”

An important advantage for the believer is his or her ability to look at life in a broad and far-reaching perspective. Such a perspective takes into account the divine point of view and looks at the ultimate purpose and destiny of every human being. Today's liturgy demonstrates the importance of having such a broad perspective for making right life choices and decisions.

Jeremiah prophesied in the years immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. In the decades leading to this tragedy, he repeatedly addressed the nation and its leaders calling for an urgent revision of life and return to the covenant with God. Today's passage comes from the collection of oracles delivered probably during the rule of king Jehoiakim (cf. 2 Kings 23:36-37). Faced with the Babylonian invasion, the king surrendered, temporarily saving his country from destruction. However, after several years, Jehoiakim rebelled, relying on his alliance with the Egyptians and counting on their help. The Babylonians reacted swiftly, putting down the rebellion and besieging Jerusalem in 597 B.C. The Egyptians did not intervene. Jehoiakim was assassinated, and Jerusalem was captured. It is likely that Jeremiah refers to these events in today's oracle.

The prophet declares a curse upon those who put their trust in “mere mortals”, while their hearts “turn away from the Lord”. Seeing how Jehoiakim and his advisers trusted the Egyptian promises, Jeremiah compared their hopes and efforts to a withering “shrub in the desert”. He knew that their political manoeuvres were vain and futile, because they were not accompanied by a change of heart and a return to God. Instead of political games and military resistance, Jeremiah recommended turning to God's law as means for survival. Jeremiah spoke against reliance on Egypt, and advocated surrender to the Babylonians. Sadly, history shows that his advice was not followed, and Jerusalem was finally destroyed in 586 B.C.

As a prophet, Jeremiah was able to see the unfolding events from a broad perspective. His oracle compares two ways of securing the nation's survival. The first way was to rely on human strength and an alliance with Egypt. The second way was to reform the religious life of the nation according to God's law, trusting that God would preserve the people. Sadly, Judah's leaders chose the first way with disastrous consequences for all.

In the second reading, we continue reading from the part of 1 Corinthians where Paul addresses the problem of the denial of the resurrection of the dead. The problem surfaced because of an ancient Greek view on

life after death which the Corinthians grew up with. According to that view, the immortal human soul was trapped in the mortal body. The body was governed by base instincts and desires, it was inferior, corruptible and weak. Therefore, the soul longed for liberation from its bodily prison. Consequently, the Corinthians would neither expect nor desire the return of the human body to life. They desired a new life apart from the body.

Paul patiently explains that the resurrection is a fact, and he will later argue that the risen body is very different from the mortal and corruptible human body. He authoritatively declares that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and his resurrection means that believers will also rise from the dead. Moreover, Christian faith and life make no sense if the dead do not come back to life. The whole point of Christian faith is to ensure continuing existence beyond death in union with God and Jesus, who was the first to rise from the dead. Therefore, Paul argues that Christian life in this world must be lived in the perspective of the life to come. Doing so, he aims to motivate the Corinthians to live in their mortal bodies, aware that they will be transformed into immortal and risen bodies in the future.

The Gospel passage presents Jesus' teaching delivered to his disciples and the crowds of the Jews and the Gentiles from the entire region. Jesus pro-

nounces four “Beatitudes”, or blessings, followed by corresponding four “Woes”, or curses. This arrangement creates a clear and striking contrast between those attitudes and action which secure God’s blessing, and those which lead to unhappiness and rejection. First, the poor are contrasted with the rich. The poor have to trust and rely on God for everything, while the rich seek security relying on their own resourcefulness and wealth. Next, the hungry, those who experience the lack of basic needs, are contrasted with those who are full, who enjoy a surplus of goods. Those who weep and live in sorrow are contrasted with those who laugh, who live a life of enjoyment and pleasure. Finally, the followers of “the Son of Man” – Jesus – suffer rejection and ridicule, while those indifferent or hostile to him and his ways are accepted and approved. These four stark contrasts compare the situation of Jesus’ followers with those who neither accept him nor follow his teaching. In this world, his followers live an insecure and difficult life, while his opponents enjoy security and stability. But Jesus provides a different perspective on this entire situation. First, he reveals that his followers are already members of the kingdom of God. Their way of life, despite being difficult, enjoys God’s approval, they are blessed. Second, Jesus looks to the future, revealing a great reversal that will take place. Thus, poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution will be turned into the rejoicing and happiness of heaven.

Jesus’ teaching aims to provide his disciples and followers with a deeper and broader perspective on what they are experiencing. Their decision to follow Jesus may bring them great challenges and affliction in the present time, but the ultimate outcome of their choice of Jesus is the dramatic reversal of their fortunes, and the heavenly union with Jesus and God in the future.

The message of this Sunday highlights a need to maintain a broad and deep perspective on life, and defines the essence of this perspective. Jeremiah proclaimed that the survival of his people cannot be secured by political alliances and human power, but lie in adherence to God and his teaching. Paul insists that the belief in the resurrection of the dead is the foundation on which the Corinthians must build their life and faith. Limiting their concerns to life in this world, and disregarding the importance of what they do in their mortal bodies leads to a partial and distorted understanding of their Christian faith and their future. Using the beatitudes and the woes Jesus instructs his followers to look beyond what they experience in the present and into the future. It is only from that far-reaching perspective that they will be able to fully understand the implications of their decision to follow Jesus. Rejecting him, or being indifferent to his teaching, might temporarily bring about a pleasant and secure life, but only a dedicated commitment to him will lead to lasting

happiness. The Psalmist had the same, far-reaching perspective, when he assured God’s faithful that, “the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

The liturgy of this Sunday makes us aware of just how fortunate and privileged we are as believers. We have been taught and enlightened through the divine revelation contained in Scripture and our tradition, regarding our present and our future life. This knowledge provides us with a deep and broad perspective on who we are, and what our destiny is. Without this perspective we might be led into thinking that we exist for a short time only and without a particular purpose, and are destined to disappear forever. Indeed, there are many in our modern world who have either lost the divinely-given perspective, or have decided not to believe it any more. The consequences of making such a choice are often tragic. Frequently we hear about a high suicide rate in modern society, even among young people. Taking one’s life is most often caused by the loss of hope for a better future, or a sense of meaninglessness. We may all experience such feelings at times. However, our faith provides a great remedy and help in such situations, because it gives us that deeper and broader perspective, on who we are, and what we are here for.

And for that gift we must be daily grateful.

One of the great deceptions created by our modern culture and lifestyle is that we reach happiness by having all our wants and wishes fulfilled. These wishes are then identified for us through advertisements and social media where enjoyment, entertainment, beauty, fashion, money, popularity, a career and success, are presented as sources of happiness. The pursuit of these, we are told, is the right focus of human life. Sadly, many, particularly among young people fall victims to these deceptions. We had a member of our youth group who was a steady and committed member for years. Something changed dramatically once he graduated and found an attractive and well-paid job. From a person who was kind, concerned and committed he changed into a rather selfish and self-focused young adult. His life now consists of working hard for five days, and then a series of drunken parties starting Friday night and ending Sunday evening. His life used to be defined by a concern for personal growth, learning, and contributing to the group. That focus disappeared, and with it his broad and far-reaching perspective on life. Sadly, many follow the same path, having lost the right perspective on life.

The right perspective on life is defined for us through the teachings of Jesus. As Christians and believers, we are entrusted with representing and proclaiming that a

truly human life cannot be limited to, and dominated by, daily concerns and pleasures. Of course we need to be concerned with our daily life, to find satisfaction and enjoyment in our work and look for joy and support in our relationships. But these pursuits and concerns must not blind us to the fact that our ultimate concern in life is to follow God's ways, and Jesus' teaching, because only in and through these will we find true and lasting happiness. Ignoring this fact may cause us to make the same mistake as Jeremiah's people, who were so confident and preoccupied with securing their own lives with their own hands, that, in the end, they lost everything. The call of today's liturgy is to maintain a broad and deep perspective on life, one that seriously acknowledges that our life comes from God, and ought to lead us back to God.

PROVERB

*“The eyes
do not carry
the load,
but they know
what the head
can carry.”*

ACTION

Self-examination:

In few sentences summarize the perspective on life you hold and follow.

What is the practical impact of the Christian belief in life after death on my daily life?

Response to God:

My prayer this week will be that of thanksgiving to God for giving me hope of living beyond death and showing me the way to reach eternal life in his presence.

Response to your World:

Before making decisions or taking actions this week, I will pause and think about the long-term consequences and outcomes of what I am about to do.

Taking into consideration the message of today's readings, we will reflect on our group's long-term plans and goals. What impact do we hope to have on others?

PRAYER

*Eternal God,
we approach you today
with deepest gratitude
because you wanted
to share with us your own life,
which even death
cannot extinguish.
We implore you
to keep us always mindful
of this great gift,
and to give us your grace
to strive for it
by faithful adherence
to your teaching,
delivered to us
through your Son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

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