

In the reading from Jeremiah today, the prophet tells us that we have to trust in the Lord, not in people or the world, but in God. That is the way we will grow and have life, have peace and bear fruit.

In today's gospel Jesus puts that trust to the test by comparing God's way with the way of the world, and clearly he is testing those who gathered to listen to him; his apostles, his disciples, the people from the whole country around and 2000 years later he is putting us to the test as well.

Jesus gives us a pretty clear definition of what it means to follow him, to be called a Christian, to show God that we have put our trust in Him and we are ready to change. He gives four reasons to be blessed, and then he gives four reasons for us to be warned.

How can we make sense of these so-called blessings? "Blessed are you are poor, who are hungry, who weep, who are hated!"

Excuse me, but these don't sound much like blessings. In fact, I think I can safely say that most of us spend a lot of time trying to avoid being in these very conditions. The way of the world is to trust in ourselves, living exactly as he warns us not to, to make sure we have lots of money, lots to eat, lots of laughs and lots of friends, these are the signs of a successful person.

I don't want to be broke, hungry, sad and rejected. How can these things be a sign that I am blessed? Is Jesus trying to tell us that it's only when we've reached these depths that we can understand what it means to give ourselves up and truly trust in the Lord.

Each of us is called, as we listen to the words of Jesus today, to reflect on our own lives and ask ourselves "How much trust are we putting in the Lord?"

Each teaching has its own challenge. Blessed the poor, woe to the rich. We live in a society that prizes financial stability above everything else, including our duty as Christians to look after the poor.

We are so focused on a faraway future that may never come that we don't look around at the very real needs of the world today. This is RRSP season and many of us will salt away thousands of dollars, tens of thousands and even more to be used in twenty or thirty years when we retire, and we forget that people are going to the Compass food bank, two blocks down the street, because they can't afford to eat today.

Of course, we have a responsibility to look after our families but all Jesus asks is that we take the time to look closely at our lives and at our resources and ask ourselves, am I showing the Lord that I trust him, in the way I am handling my finances?

Is there a balance in my actions that shows I am ready to have less and trust more? Can I pray about it, can I talk to my family about it and see how each of them is feeling, can I ignore the commercials promoting unlimited wealth and turn to the pages of scripture for guidance instead.

What about being hungry instead of full? Maybe this one is easier to deal with. Two-thirds of Canadians are overweight or obese and the rate has doubled in the last 50 years and we are paying the price in terms of our health.

So perhaps it is better to be hungry after all. But Jesus isn't talking about healthy dieting with exactly the right levels of nutrition, he is talking about the kind of hunger that prevents you from living when so much food is wasted or mishandled.

The world spent well over a trillion and a half dollars for military expenses last year when a Vatican study showed that less than 10% of that could eliminate world hunger. 9 million people die of hunger each year and 150 million children are stunted or wasted because they don't have enough to eat.

Do we need to suffer hunger ourselves, true hunger, to understand what we are called to do? Will true hunger, real fasting, help us put these truths in perspective and call us to trust in God by having a little less, so that others will have enough.

Lent is coming up next month and though we may fast a little, and that is good, why don't we spend some time researching exactly what our need for questionable progress is doing to the production and distribution of food, the first-world corporate and government policies that are maximizing profit while destroying the traditional foundations of agriculture throughout the third world, especially in poorer countries.

When we see what is really happening by studying the information available, it will soon be clear that trust in God is crucial to making the right decisions in future.

Next Jesus challenges us by saying blessed are those who weep and woe to those who laugh.

Perhaps he is trying to say that we all need to weep a bit more at the state of the world and spend less time trying to distract ourselves from the truth with diversions and entertainments.

The global entertainment industry will be worth more than 2 trillion dollars a year by next year, with North American families spending over \$3000 a year each to be distracted from reality. As Jesus says, we may be laughing, but it is draining our resources and keeping us from reflecting on what is really happening to the world around us.

Trusting in God means facing the truth, even if it makes us weep, and using the determination that comes from our sorrow to change things, so that when we laugh, it is from the joy of God's kingdom and not from the shallow jokes of comedians.

Finally, Jesus says we are blessed when we are hated, because he knows that when we speak the truth, it will be unpopular with those who don't want to hear it. Not so long ago in Canada, Catholics were persecuted because of our beliefs, my own father experienced it, but today one rarely hears about that happening.

Is it because the world has grown more tolerant or is it because Christians and Catholics are less ready to speak up for what is right and prefer to just get along with others. To Trust God means to stand by what he has taught us and we all are called to reflect on whether or not we have risked being unpopular in order to stand up for what is right?

There's an awful lot to consider in these four short pairs of blessings and woes and it's unlikely we can change the way we embrace these teachings overnight, but we can start with trust. Trust in God enough to give him some time, in prayer and contemplation. Trust that he will reward that time with a clearer vision for you, and the things you thought you had to do, because you didn't have time to pray, will get done anyway.

Where will our strength come from to rise to this challenge? This strength is with us when Jesus is with us, it comes from the Eucharist, it comes from receiving his body to be one with us. We can trust him when he is part of us as we would trust ourselves and more.

Embracing these difficult blessings will take courage as well, and so we are called to offer prayers for one another as brother and sister Christians, to trust that the Holy Spirit is watching over our lives every day as Jesus promised he would.

Trust in the Lord, and as the prophet promises and Jesus teaches, we will be blessed with lives that bear fruit and lives that lead to our eternal salvation.