

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 6th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C (2024)

After a tragedy, sometimes the most striking word, from a survivor's or witness' mouth, is when they say 'But I'm blessed', or 'but it is a blessing', about what just happened around them! Even after the tragedy? But I'd say they have just experienced exactly what Jesus is talking about in the Beatitudes today. It isn't minimizing the depth of the tragedy, it is just holding on to that 'something greater' in life that God adds to our experiences. By clinging to blessing, they have found 'it' – what is going to make the difference between making it or not! What I am suggesting is that when bad things happen, good people show up and they bring it – they bring the good to it-the blessing! And a version of this is happening in what we hear with today's gospel!

Jesus is teaching that, "Blessed are the poor, hungry, weeping, and insulted or hated"? It would be no surprise though if we react to these words of His, with a questioning, "Huh--in what world are these blessings?" How could grief, hunger, insult and poverty be blessings? Answer: In the Kingdom of God! What Jesus is up to, is that, He is revealing another world to us! (He's flipping our known world upside down-and I'll say more on that in minute---that especially in the gospel of Luke, this is a common theme of 'reversal'- that the last is first, & the least is greatest, etc)

While the Beatitudes, may seem other-worldly, I bet that on a practical level, we have had some experiences in life that have taught us, some things may be blessings that do not seem to be at first. A 'classic' example of this is when people say things like how frustrated and upset they were when they got stuck in line at the store checkout, and then only a few minutes later they came upon a terrible fatality crash on the highway going home (but for that few minutes delay-they would have been in the middle of the accident!) Or how often do we hear of cancelled seats on flights, or someone being held up in a TSA security line and then that's the flight that goes down in a crash. Jesus is teaching that we should not be so reactive, and rash about making judgements as to our woes/blessings.

Or stepping back a minute, maybe we can understand the beatitudes anew, approaching them this way: Consider these words of Jesus, in Luke 14:10, He commands His disciples to '*take the lowest seats at banquets*' Jesus is basically saying, "If we start at the bottom, then it is only 'UP' from there. If we start at bottom, then it only gets better (it has got to get better!)" (*He will go on to say in Luke 14:11, 'the exalted will be humbled, but the humbled will be exalted'*). I am reminded of the line from the poet Oscar Wilde, who I'm paraphrasing, but said, 'if I happen to end up, lying flat on my back in the gutter, it may be the best view, still, up to the stars!" (*He'd know from experience, as his best poem may be the 'Ballad of Reading Gaol' which he wrote after his own imprisonment!*) So, Jesus was saying that the honest realist, is in the best position to be surprised by joy-blessing!

Or another approach to seeing how these beatitudes of Jesus are true 'blessings' in fact, consider that, in order for a person to be filled-satisfied, they first needed being empty or lacking. I need hands that are opened, hands that have surrendered and let go of, what they previously clung to, **in order** to receive/ take on the new gift! God could say, "I have this gift to hand you, but you can't hold it with full hands already hoarding tightly what's in them!" So a seeming loss of poverty, sadness & hunger it is just preparation for the coming reception of better being filled again!

And even another approach (yes, one more!) to understanding what Jesus means with the Beatitudes, is that we can welcome a sense of sacrifice willingly and generously, when we know we are in good company. I think of so many times hearing this phrase (and I treasure it) from those who are older and wiser among us, when they talk about their humble childhoods on farm, and they say, "Father, when we growing up, we were all poor, but we just didn't know it!" They had the basics, or their family/neighbors helped cover over shortages. Most importantly, they had the supportive love of family around them. This is the great insight that St Paul came to in Philippians 4:12, when he says he learned the 'the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry-to have plenty and to have nothing.' Having Christ with Him was everything, whether he had anything else or not! The Blessing comes, from who we have around us! The Beatitudes suggest that we can all do without (it is alright after all!), and we can be deprived, as long as we are in good company. The good company compensates. If I am going to be hungry, I am okay, being hungry with you! Great sacrifices can be accepted, depending on who it is with or for! Who we experience it with! Think of the most memorable road trips we've been on (even all bunched up in the car, hungry and tired- but it was so fun!) or the greatest, and most successful work crews I served with, might have been the hardest, most stressful & demanding jobs-but they're most memorable! Jesus is saying that these **hard positions, difficult circumstances** are not to be run from, they can be moments of tremendous grace! Great serenity comes when we can cope with and get by with less! I remember my grandmother telling me she had her coffee best, simple and black. "Don't complicate the coffee, she said, with sugar and cream, and you won't be disappointed when the milk cream is soured, or the sugar has ants in it!" The musician Alanis Morissette sings in her song 'Thank-you', that she learned after losing everything, what freedom really meant! She sings, "The moment I let go of it...Was the moment I got more than I could handle." (Or even the old rap song, that mentioned 'Mo Money, Mo Problems') And in our catholic tradition, we have St Francis who teaches us that 'it is in giving, that we receive, and in dying that we are born to eternal life'! Having let go, we are the more appreciative of ever having it at all! Gratitude is the greatest coping mechanism! That is Beatitude with Jesus! It is who we have with us that blesses!

Notes:

Story of monk who was on trip with two brothers, he carried one of his brothers bags, and was deep in his prayer/meditation as they walked along didn't realize at all the extra weight/burden of bags. The other brother saw this, and took advantage of him, complaining that he suddenly felt faint, and the good brother offered to carry his bag for a while too. He continued to trudge along the road, weighed down with everyone's baggage, but since he went back to his deep prayer and meditation, the extra weight didn't seem to bother him at all. When they had covered all the journey that they could on foot, they loaded with other passengers on to a boat and set to sea for the last leg of their trip. The young monk now so tired, just laid up on top of the big pile of baggage, and off he went into a deep sleep. After a day at sea, he woke at the sound of the ship coming to port, and smelled the awful stench of sickness, and looked around seeing everyone green in color and laying around-surrounded by their vomit. Asking what happened, they said a terrible storm blew up that tossed the ship so badly, it tossed their stomachs too, but the over-taxed monk, had just peacefully slept through it all. His focus on the kingdom of God-his work and prayer, kept him above all the tumult and tossing around of the world. He enjoyed his peace in God! Blessed are the poor, the kingdom of God is theirs!