

## SPIRITUALITY

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 6:23ab

R7. Alleluia, alleluia.  
 Rejoice and be glad,  
 your reward will be great in heaven.  
 R7. Alleluia, alleluia.

## Gospel

Luke 6:17, 20-26; L78C

Jesus came down with the  
 Twelve  
 and stood on a stretch of  
 level ground  
 with a great crowd of his  
 disciples  
 and a large number of the  
 people  
 from all Judea and  
 Jerusalem  
 and the coastal region of  
 Tyre and Sidon.

And raising his eyes toward  
 his disciples he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,  
 for the kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are now hungry,  
 for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who are now weeping,  
 for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you,  
 and when they exclude and insult you,  
 and denounce your name as evil  
 on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!

Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.

For their ancestors treated the prophets in  
 the same way.

But woe to you who are rich,  
 for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are filled now,  
 for you will be hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,  
 for you will grieve and weep.

Woe to you when all speak well of you,  
 for their ancestors treated the false  
 prophets in this way.”



## Reflecting on the Gospel

When parents leave children on their own for the first time it can be a big decision. Instructions are clear, often written down on a sheet of paper. Maybe a mobile phone or a home phone is available so the parties can stay in touch. And oftentimes the children remember or misremember instructions, reaching out to parents for additional clarity. Did the parents say no dessert? Or no dessert until after dinner? Did they say no TV/screen time, or limited TV/screen time? Some might remember the instructions differently.

Today in the Gospel of Luke we have Jesus' Sermon on the Plain as opposed to Matthew's Jesus who gives the Sermon on the Mount. Luke's Jesus preaches to a great crowd of disciples (indicating there were more than twelve) whereas Matthew's Jesus preaches to the disciples (and there were only twelve in the Gospel of Matthew).

But perhaps one of the greatest differences in the two versions of this story is not the setting or the audience but the message itself. Both Luke and Matthew begin with four beatitudes, but Matthew concludes with additional beatitudes. Luke, on the other hand, matches the four beatitudes with four woes that are frankly disturbing to the moderate, middle-class listener from the developed world.

We might ask what's wrong with being well off, having our fill of food and laughter, and being spoken well of? This might even be the goal of the so-called prosperity gospel we hear about so often in popular culture. But

Luke sees it differently. Blessings are for those who are poor, hungry, weeping, and those hated. For whom is this good news? The rich and content? Hardly. Luke's Sermon on the Plain echoes themes introduced in Mary's *Magnificat* in the opening of the gospel. The hungry are fed while the rich are turned away empty. Jesus' values are not those of the world. To be countercultural means identifying with those who are blessed, not clawing one's way to keep company with those who are destined for woe.

Luke has something to say to us today. This message is not limited to the time of Jesus. It is for us. Where do we find ourselves? In the four beatitudes or the four woes? This message is as much for us as it is for the disciples, if we dare to carry that name.

## Living the Paschal Mystery

Sometimes it can be difficult to imagine why Jesus faced suffering and death. Often there is a popular idea that would have Jesus preaching only love, peace, kindness, and lilies of the field. The thinking goes that in the face of such preaching he was put to death by those who were against love, peace, and kindness. Such is too facile an explanation.

Jesus' preaching was certainly about love, but it was about much more. Somebody preaching love is no threat to the establishment, no threat to the powerful. Somebody preaching love can easily be dismissed as a dreamer and best left alone.

Today's gospel gives us some of Jesus' preaching that likely created enemies for himself. His preaching favored the poor, hungry, weeping, and hated. He upended not only ancient cultural norms and values but modern ones too. Rather than simply give a verbal pat on the head to those on the bottom rungs of society, he also pulls down the mighty and issues woes that apply just as much to

us as they did to those in power in antiquity. In so doing, Jesus creates enemies, not of the poor but of the powerful. It is they who will ultimately put him to death. But as we know, his suffering and death is not the end. God raises him up to glory, giving us the paschal mystery. His followers find themselves allied with those blessed by Jesus.

**Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** Blessed are you who are poor, / for the kingdom of God is yours.

**To the point:** Jesus begins his famous Sermon on the Plain in Luke (a companion to Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount) by turning the world on its head. In the kingdom of God the blessed are those who are marginalized and oppressed in our societies. And those who enjoy favor now will not find it in God’s kingdom. Today Jesus gives us a choice. Do we glory in the richness of the kingdom of God or in what our world counts as riches? Do we stand with the hungry and grieving, or are we too busy feasting and laughing to notice their pain?

**Connecting the Gospel**

**to the first reading:** The cursed and the blessed are also mentioned in the first reading from the prophet Jeremiah. Here the distinguishing feature centers on trust. While the cursed trust in fallible humanity, the blessed trust in God. Jeremiah prophesied during a time of great peril in Israel’s history. Instead of remaining faithful to the covenant, many of the people had begun to worship idols. Through Jeremiah, God invites the people to once more be faithful to the covenant of their ancestors and to trust in him alone.

**to experience:** At times it is difficult to trust in God, whom we do not see, when there are so many products and people assuring us that by turning ourselves over to their patented formula, three-step method, or unique program, all will be well. Where in your own life might God be calling you to trust in him alone?

**Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** Today’s psalm, the first in the book of Psalms, also contrasts the just with the wicked, the blessed with the cursed. Whereas Luke separates these groups by what they have and experience, and Jeremiah separates them by whom they trust, the psalmist makes a distinction in how they are rooted—in the law of the Lord or in the ways of the wicked. This psalm can be seen as an introduction to the entire book of Psalms and it states its thesis quite clearly: Happy is the one who is rooted in God. This person “meditates on his law day and night.” The “law” in this case can be read as “Torah,” the first five books of the Old Testament, traditionally attributed to Moses by the people of Israel. In today’s gospel we see allusions to Moses, the lawgiver, coming down from Mount Sinai. Jesus returns from the mountain where he has chosen twelve of his disciples to be apostles and preaches God’s law to the great multitude of people who are gathered. As the psalmist proclaims, Happy is the one who “delights in the law of the LORD / and meditates on his law day and night.”

**to psalmist preparation:** Like the gospel, this psalm clearly lays out two ways for us to choose from—the way of the just or the way of the wicked. This choice is before us always, in every decision and action that make up our daily lives. Let your love for God’s law and desire to remain rooted in God shine through as you proclaim this psalm.

**PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

In the reading from the prophet Jeremiah and in the psalm, there is a common image: the one who trusts in God and meditates on God’s law is like a tree planted beside flowing water. Nourished deeply by the living water of God’s love, the just one flourishes and bears fruit. Where do you find living water in your own life? How might God be inviting you to drink even more deeply?

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In the Nicene Creed we state: “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead.” How does belief in the resurrection of the dead affect your faith life?

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In your daily life what are some actions you can take to align yourself with those Jesus proclaims as blessed: the poor, the hungry, the grieving, and the outcast?

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In Luke’s Sermon on the Plain Jesus includes statements of woe after the more familiar statements of blessing that are also included in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. Why do you think these statements are included? How do they challenge you in your life of faith?

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