

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

Luke’s Beatitudes are part of a sermon on the plain, not on a mountain as was Matthew’s chosen setting. It is not geography that governs each evangelist’s choice, but rather theology and the particular challenge each emphasizes for different communities. Luke’s setting reflects Jesus’s very down-to-earth ground rules for inclusion in the kingdom of God. The Lukan Beatitudes are less spiritualized than Matthew’s and, consequently, have more concrete social implications.

His words put down the standards of his society and raise up those of the kingdom of God. Jesus is indulging in neither scare tactics nor praise for complacent satisfaction with one’s social status, so how do we “transplant” these words into our own lives and society two thousand years later?

For Luke, the poor were not just the poor in spirit (as in Matt 5:3); they were the economically impoverished, the people on the margins, pushed there by a society that did not take seriously the covenant responsibility to which Moses and the prophets had called them. The poor are specially loved by God, not so much because of what they are, but because of what God is—the compassionate defender of the weak and powerless (Deut 10:18; Amos 2:6-7). As the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote in his 1991 essay in *Voices from the Margin*: “God has a preferential love for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or religiously, but simply because they are living in an inhuman situation that is contrary to God’s will. The ultimate

basis for the privileged position of the poor is not in the poor themselves but in God, in the graciousness and universality of God’s agapeic love.”

As individuals, church, governments, our justice re-presents God’s justice to the world. The poor, hungry, weeping, and persecuted people are those for whom the church calls us to make a special option, one that will have both personal and political consequences. In their pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, the US bishops offer a finely balanced statement about the economy: “Decisions must be judged in the light of what they do for the poor, what they do to the poor, and what they enable the poor to do for themselves” (24). Our option for the poor is to be preferential not exclusive, respectful not denigrating, enabling not patronizing.

Since the poor do not need to be told that they are poor, it seems that Luke has very much in mind the audience of affluent, comfortable, and self-satisfied Christians in his communities. To make sure that poverty is not romanticized, Jesus speaks the next two beatitudes to the hungry and weeping. Jesus and the early church, in his Spirit, will provide for the hungry (Luke 9:17; 16:21; Acts 6:1-4), and tears are more precious in God’s sight than derisive laughter (Luke 7:32, 38). Discipleship is not to be domesticated; it may demand the high price of hatred, exclusion, scorn, and eviction from the places of the privileged. It is the struggle for justice when, for example, low-income housing estates are gentrified or when those who fear a drop in their land value protest about group homes for people with disabilities being built in their “neighborhood” (the term that, ironically, is often used). When governments ignore the potential impact



of climate change on the small land holdings of subsistence farmers, when their social welfare budget is insignificant when compared to the money spent on war, and when we—as citizens not only of our own nations but also of the kingdom of God—do nothing to advocate justice, then our ears need to be dug out by the “woes” of Jesus.

Focusing the Gospel

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

To the point: This is one of those times in the gospel when Jesus doesn’t mince words, but gets right to the point. The kingdom of God belongs to the poor. The hungry will be satisfied. Those who are weeping will laugh. On the flip side, the rich have nothing left to receive, the full will be hungry, and those who are laughing will weep. This makes no sense in a world built around consuming for convenience, media impact, purchasing power, and the accumulation of wealth. What are we supposed to do with these words?

This week’s gospel invites us to focus on the end game. Our purpose in this earthly life is to get to heaven, and bring as many people with us as possible. Do not let the physical and material goals of your career and family distract you from that ultimate goal. You are trying to love others, especially your family, in such a way that you condition your soul and theirs for heaven. That’s what we’re doing on Sunday. That’s what you’re invited to do in your vocation. That’s the reason we seek good, rich, healthy relationships with friends, family, and colleagues. When we live with our eyes on heaven, this life becomes far more vibrant and satisfying. Shift your focus from earthy achievements to those of a love much greater.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: Jeremiah is equally fervent about directing one’s attention away from “his strength in flesh” and instead toward the Lord. The first reading is two contrasting metaphors: one of a bush in the desert that cannot change with the seasons, and one of a tree with growing roots that are watered by the Lord.

to experience: Do you ever feel like you’re standing in a parched desert, unable to let the seasons change you? This is a common experience that we’re bound to have multiple times in our lives. Allow yourself, this week, to pinpoint areas where you need to water your roots.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: The psalmist provides imagery to complement Jeremiah. “He is like a tree / planted near running water, / that yields its fruit in due season, / and whose leaves never fade.” It’s winter in the northern hemisphere. How are you experiencing this season? Do you feel like you’re in a spiritual hibernation, or are you blooming?

to psalmist preparation: Take some time this week to imagine moments in your own spiritual life when you have experienced each of the four seasons. When was winter, a dark time when you perhaps lost someone or experienced a trial? Can you recall a spring, when your faith began to open more and bloom? Have you lived through a summer in your faith, when prayer was easy and you felt God “in sync” with your life? What was autumn like, watching the leaves turn glorious colors as your faith matured?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Have you ever been spiritually hungry?
Have you ever been physically hungry?

What season of faith are you currently in?

When was the last time your faith felt like a barren bush in the desert? Or a tree being fed by the waters of the Lord?

What are specific actions you can take to align yourself more fully with Jesus’s call in the gospel?
