

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
Jeremiah 17:5-8 / Luke 6:17. 20-26
13.02. 2022
HAPPINESS

Dear brothers and sisters,

Happy are those who put their trust in God, that is to say those who pray to God; those who live in his presence; those who are in relationship with Him, loving him, striving to do his will and to love their neighbour. But, alas, for those who put their trust in another human being. Alas for those who trust in the work of their hands, relying on themselves alone, as it is often the case. These will not enjoy true and lasting happiness. It has to be said that we can so easily make an idol of ourselves. We can end up worshipping and serving ourselves alone! We can be our worst enemy and, most of the time, we won't fear this enemy because we are familiar with it. Those who are familiar with Sacred Scriptures will have recognized 'variations' on the words of the prophet Jeremiah heard in our first reading. Similar words of wisdom run throughout the Scriptures.

We find the same theme already in the Book of Deuteronomy (30:15...) where we read that there are two ways open before us: a way which leads to life and prosperity and a way which leads to disaster and death. The Lord says: "I am offering you life or death, blessing-happiness or curse. Choose life!"

The Book of Psalms opens with the same perspective: Happiness is promised to those "whose delight is the Law of the Lord and who ponder his law day and night" and not to those who enjoy the company of the wicked, sinners and scorners. The one who delights in God's law is "like a tree that is planted beside the flowing waters, that yields its fruit in due season and whose leaves shall never fade". The wicked who forget God are "like winnowed chaff; they are driven away by the wind". The just one is stable, rooted and fruitful. The wicked one is without roots and sterile. We recognize in these words images similar to those employed by Jeremiah in our first reading.

Putting our trust in God and living fidelity to prayer bring happiness, love, mercy, peace, joy; being committed to the Lord and to prayer leads us to experience consolation and communion. When our hearts turn from the Lord, depression, anger, judgment, fear, and violence are inclined to invade us; desolation and isolation are our lot.

Jesus takes up this theme and makes it his own in the Beatitudes and Curses recorded for us in Luke's gospel. Jesus dares to proclaim happy those who are poor, those who are hungry now, those who weep now, those who are hated... These are difficult statements to appreciate. They are not easily understandable. To be poor, to be hungry, to weep, to be hated do not go with happiness... Just ask the opinion of those whose life situations are marked by these challenges... They will tell you. But Jesus adds: Happy you who are hungry now: you shall be satisfied (later)... Have we to understand that Jesus invites us to suffer here below, just to shut up and be happy now, because everything will be alright in the world to come? This is not what Jesus says: Jesus does not say suffer now and you

will be happy in the future as a reward. He says: Be happy now, you who suffer now, you shall be satisfied.

In order to understand what Jesus means in these Beatitudes, it may be useful for us to digress a little and look at what we mean when we speak of the Eucharist as a memorial. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we remember a past event: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus which is made present in our liturgical celebration. But we remember also by anticipation the heavenly banquet which will take place at the end of time and to which we are all invited. This forthcoming heavenly banquet is also made present in the celebration. In the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the past and the future are brought together and made present to us.

When we celebrate the Eucharist, we give thanks to the Lord for his resurrection and our resurrection, our resurrection which is not yet completely attained: a resurrection which has still to happen at the end of time, but which is already fully offered, fully present by anticipation in the Eucharistic celebration. This is known as the theology of the “already” and the “not yet”.

Let us now apply the dynamic of the Eucharistic memorial to the Beatitudes. Today, in the midst of our trials, the Lord Jesus tells us that we have to be happy. Our happiness comes partially from our salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and partially from an anticipation of that fullness of salvation which will be ours at the end of time, when the Lord will come and share with us his victory. Our happiness in the midst of our trials comes from the assurance, the certitude of our faith in the final victory of Christ in which he has promised to give us a share. We don't yet experience fullness of happiness, but we believe in happiness by anticipation, when we are situated in a spirit of Christian hope: even in our suffering happiness is our lot.

When Jesus says: “Happy you who are poor... Happy you who are hungry now... Happy you who weep now...”, He speaks of a happiness which has its source both in the past event of our salvation (the death and resurrection of Jesus undergone for our salvation) and in an anticipated future (the final resurrection), foretasted in the already and the not yet, which are to be held together in our daily life of faith and prayer.

From this same perspective we understand the curses: “Alas for you who are rich now, alas for you who you have your fill now...” The richness or the fill Jesus refers to here are only those which are present but which will not last... Here he speaks of a present without roots and without future. He refers to an ephemeral present, an ephemeral happiness, a happiness made by ourselves and not to an eternal happiness given to us by God.

Let us leave the last word to the psalmist: “I say to the Lord: “You are my God. My happiness lies in you alone... You will show me the path of life, the fullness of joy in your presence, at your right hand happiness for ever” (Ps 15:2. 11.) Let us put our trust in the Lord so that we may experience true and lasting happiness. Amen!