

6th Sunday of the Year (C)
(Jeremiah 17:5-8 / Luke 6:17.20-26)
16.02.2025
Blessed are you...

Today both Scripture readings heard convey a very realistic and ever-relevant message: there will always be poverty, hunger and pain in each one of our lives. We must not lose sight of the fact that our human nature and the whole of creation are going through the pangs of a new birth (cf. Mt 24:8). As persons and as communities, we are stretched by the new creation taking place within us and so our limitations and our sins rebel against us. They resist the radical transfiguration happening in our lives. For this reason we endure pain and suffering.

The fact that this dynamic seems unavoidable does not mean that we are completely powerless. By God's grace, we are empowered to prevent, alleviate and remove all that detracts from our dignity, all that cripples us and hinders us from being fully alive.

The reality is that the journey to fulness of life, our growth to the full stature of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13) has been, is and will be rhythmized by low tides and high tides. Like St Paul we all have to walk the challenging road to Damascus; like Jesus, we all have to climb up the hard path to Golgotha; like Cleopas and his companion we are called to make the joyful journey back to Jerusalem.

It is striking that Jeremiah and Jesus do not say "*if* the heat comes it feels no alarm" or "*if* people hate you" but "*when* the heat comes..." and "*when* people hate you..." Jesus tells us nowhere that there is a guarantee that we will not endure pain and suffering. For all of us, the road is often bumpy and sometimes really tough, life does not flow like a long quiet stream.

Feelings of anger, sadness, loneliness, shame and guilt are part of the journey, they are part of what it means to be truly human. Not to feel them in some way would make us less than human. The challenge is not to nourish them, to allow them to grow and define us. Christ redeemed all pain and suffering on the Cross.

His risen life which is at work within us is stronger than every hardship, every pain and suffering. With St Paul, we can say: "Who or what will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (...) Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rm 8:35.38-39)

The difficult bit when it comes to the Beatitudes is that when we hear: "happy (or blessed) are you...", we immediately link happiness with a painless life, a life without suffering and pain. Whether we want it or not we are all inclined to adhere to a sort of *prosperity theology*. Sometimes we believe that to be a Christian means that we are entitled to well-being, physical health and economic prosperity. That can make us, at the least, very puzzled when blessedness and happiness do not come our way in the manner we imagine they should.

Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe reminds us that the revelation of God's glory is the Cross – a man dying and abandoned. The idea is so shocking that it apparently took four hundred years before anyone dared to depict it. The earliest known representation of the crucified Christ is perhaps that on the doors of Santa Sabina in Rome, carved in 432. The irresistible

beauty of God shines through utter poverty. Therein lies for us, as much as in joy and thanksgiving, the blessedness promised by Christ.

After this being said, let us be careful not to conclude that we have to suffer in order to know blessedness, but what we can conclude is that when we suffer, because Christ is with us always, we can taste and savour blessedness and grow in the image and likeness of God.

The Beatitudes remind us that happiness and blessedness are about being with Christ, being “in Christ” (2 Co 5:17) as St Paul says.

Whatever may happen to us, whatever we have done or has been done to us, blessedness is at hand in Christ who dwells within us. Since our vocation is to love, every moment of life, whether painful or joyful, can be lived in love, as Christ loves.

To the extent that we accept Christ’s proposal and set out to follow him, we too can participate in his blessedness. We can be a blessing for the world, for all those we meet, not because we have a perfect life free from suffering but because we have a heart which knows what is suffering; a heart which has been through it with Christ, with faith, hope and love.

In one of his novels, Elie Wiesel has one of his characters say: “So you hope to defeat evil? Fine. Begin by helping your fellow-man and woman. You hope to triumph over death? Excellent. Begin by saving your brother or sister.” (*The Oath*)

May we know the blessedness, the genuine happiness of helping one another on the journey. Using words from the letter Pope Francis addressed recently to the US Bishops: let us live in solidarity and fraternity; let us build bridges that bring us ever closer together; let us avoid walls of ignominy and learn to give our lives as Jesus Christ gave his life for the salvation of all (10.02.2025).