

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C

Lk 6:17, 20-26

Dear Friends,

Luke's gospel has some truly startling statements when it comes to the rich and the poor. They are part of the great reversal that is at the center of the Lucan gospel message. These bombshells of Jesus are like flashes of lightening that grow into a shocking thunder of surprise and wonder. It starts with the Magnificat of Mary, (Lk 1:46-55): **"He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart, He has thrown down the rulers from their throne but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty."** (Lk 1: 51-53)

This great reversal is set out in even deeper clarity in the Beatitudes in today's gospel reading. Jesus is saying that this proclamation of the Kingdom renders a new experience of reality. This is the great reversal where the poor are blessed and the rich are now the new losers. It takes some deep faith and commitment to grasp this shattering of a common-sense perception of reality. The values of the world are put in total disarray. The onset of the Kingdom introduces an absolutely new way, completely new values.

The Bible's use of the term blessed usually does not define the quality of the person's moral state. It refers to the benefits that are coming from an action of God. It is like winning God's lottery. The blessings of the Beatitudes express the values being revealed in the upside-down world of Jesus' coming salvation. To be poor, hungry, weeping and reviled rather than rich, full, laughing and held in esteem are the new norms. Jesus is explaining the new reality that is the great reversal. Jesus, to be sure, is not denying the pain and loss of the poverty, hunger, personal devastation and rejection. He is declaring a turnaround of what most

people hold as rewards and disadvantages. There will be a great upheaval flowing from the coming action of God in the Kingdom.

Jesus is not blessing poverty and deprivation, anguish and misery. He is pointing out two truths: first is that the coming of the Kingdom addresses the condition of suffering and deprivation; secondly, the experience of the newly blessed tends to help the person be more receptive to God's coming. The new reality will mean the loss of these hurting elements. The action of God in Jesus unveils a new reality and freedom. Wealth, prosperity and the other woes are obstacles to the new norms of God's Kingdom.

While the economic and social dimension meaning of "poor" cannot be trivialized by some spiritual interpretation, the biblical tradition includes all the afflicted no matter what the cause of their condition. The poor are those whose bleakness and impoverishment benefit from God's saving action.

All throughout his gospel, Luke gives us stories, miracles and teachings and experiences that flesh out this meaning of "poor" in Jesus' proclamation of the good news of the great reversal. The role of women is a highlight throughout the text. The parables of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son and the widow challenging the unjust judge along with the story of Zacchaeus are concrete examples of the two-fold blessings of the Kingdom: first the simple blessing of the great reversal and secondly the personal integrity of one embracing the great reversal.

Pope Francis has a great insight of what happens when we do not respond to Jesus' invitation as Zacchaeus did. In *The Joy of the Gospel* (#54), the Pontiff says, **"Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other peoples pain and feeling a need to help them as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own."**

The power of Jesus' insight on the great reversal of the blessings and the woes was set in motion by his teachings and his actions. Jesus unveiled the presence of the reign of God penetrating the human condition of every person. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of Jesus. A true encounter with Jesus invites the disciple to become like him who is the most authentic expression of the Beatitudes. Jesus' message penetrates and renovates us. Now we are truly blessed with a heart set on the Kingdom. Embracing the great reversal leads to seeing and hearing with new eyes and ears. We begin to see the pervasive injustice and poverty of our world. We begin to hear the cry of the poor. The integrity of our response is our way into the Kingdom.