

I would like to do a little poll today. Who here in the congregation would like to be poor, starving, weeping and hated by everyone? Not many takers for that one. Okay, who here would like to be wealthy - win that lottery? Who here likes great meals and likes to laugh and even being well thought of - respected - by those around you?

After hearing that gospel, we all are a bit hesitant, right? I mean, Jesus declares a blessing on those who are poor, hungry, weeping and hated. To make sure we get the point, he then goes on and explicitly pronounces a woe on those who are rich, well fed, happy and well spoken of.

Does Jesus want us to understand that material poverty in itself is a sign of divine approval and material prosperity a sign of divine disapproval? I mean, there are some pretty evil people out there who are poor and there are some very loving and generous people who are wealthy. What is going on here?

Poverty in itself is not a blessing but a misfortune, a lack. In fact, all the qualifying factors mentioned in Luke's Beatitudes -- poverty, hunger, weeping, hatred, exclusion, -- are all misfortunes. These are things no good parents would want for their children (i.e. "*Make us proud son and be hated.*"). Neither would God want these things for us, His children.

How are we then to understand Luke's Beatitudes? The key to Luke's Beatitudes is to be found in an important clause which he adds at the end of the last beatitude, and the clause is "on account of the Son of Man." What he means is that those who accept these dire conditions as the price that they have to pay for following Christ, are *blessed* to him.

Jesus foresaw the future and knew there would be a time of terrible social and religious persecution of believers. And it most certainly did come to pass, because anyone professing to be a Christian knew for sure that he or she would be disowned by family, rejected by friends and excluded from the synagogue.

+Imagine the oldest son of a fundamentalist Muslim family in Saudi Arabia converting to Christianity. In so doing, you get an idea of what they went through to become Christian.

These words of blessings have carried so very many people over people over the centuries - such as those dying in concentration camps or within the rubble of an earthquake; those suffering from terminal illness or a child in abusive home constantly told that she is worthless.

+Or I think back to that Italian journalist in Iraq, who before being behead, says "*Now you will see how a Roman dies.*"

Yes, how consoled to hear Jesus' words: "*You are blessed to me and your reward will be great in heaven.*" It is just as Mary told Bernadette of Lourdes: "*I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the next.*" Jesus' words of blessing carry us through this world into the next.

Jesus words of blessing are in some sense reiterating what has always been the case from the very beginning, for when God created the world, God blessed it and called it good, very good. And from it came life. In our words of blessings for others, there comes new life in the one blessed. When we bless someone, we give them life: *You are good, very good... You are so very special... You make such a difference...* In case you are giving one life!

And conversely, our words can also poison and rob the joy from one's life. The woes of Jesus come to those who have gained at the expense of others.

To be blessed it to be noticed, to be seen and to be heard. Some of the most painful experiences of one's life is when we are not seen or listened to when we say something. i.e. Your talking to someone and they look past you, to someone perhaps, more important.

Jesus never looks past us - Jesus sees us. There is a deep longing inside of us to be seen by those we look up to - to be recognized. That is what Jesus did - he made people realize that God sees them and in that seeing is to be blessed and to feel very good because of it.

+It makes me recall when a number of my nieces and nephews were small children, hanging all over this tree, some upside down yelling, "*Uncle Patrick look at me! Look what I can do.*" I cringed, as all I could picture was for them fall and break their necks. But I made sure they knew I saw them, "*Wow!*"

Good parents see their kids, as do good teachers and coaches. +When people have an audience with the pope it is not so much to have a conversation, but that he *sees you* - looks into your eyes. That is what it means to be blessed and know we are someone in this world.

Blessing begets blessing. A child brought up in a loving home will most certainly bless others later in life.

Bless (not bless out!) someone today; *see* them; *notice* them; *hear* them and you may very well change the direction of one's life in simply blessing them with your presence.

And so I bless all of you, in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit...for you are good, you are blessed to me and forever so in Christ Jesus.