

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(Jeremiah 17:5-8 / Luke 6: 17. 20-26)  
17.02.2019

A key to understanding the very basic call addressed to us through Luke's version of the beatitudes is given to us in today's first reading taken from the writings of the prophet Jeremiah. That key is trust and hope.

When I think of those whom I have been graced to encounter who have come to the point whereby they are able to live their lives in the spirit of the beatitudes, it strikes me that they are men and women whom I know to have suffered in life, men and women who by their passage through the *school of suffering* have been *so fashioned by grace* – as the Opening Prayer of today's Eucharist puts it – that they have arrived at what St Paul calls their *full stature in Christ*.

One of the great lessons suffering will have taught these people is the need for them to become totally reliant upon God's providence; the necessity for them to set aside any notion of self-sufficiency harboured in their hearts, in order to live their lives with their trust and hope placed in God. As I think of these people a line from a psalm with which most of us will be familiar comes to mind. I think of that line in Psalm 115 which reads: *I trusted even when I said no man can be trusted*. Men and women who live in the spirit of the beatitudes are men and women who have come to trust in the Lord always.

The poet who penned the words I quoted from Psalm 115 was evidently someone who had experienced human disappointments during his life journey and yet he was able to testify to his unwavering hope in God. His stance of trust and hope in God is one the Sacred Scriptures invite all of us to make our own in so many places: *Trust in God still and trust in Me... Hope in me and you will not be disappointed... The one who hopes in the Lord will stand firm forever...*

It seems to me that the point we are being invited to grasp today by the Church's bringing together the passage of Jeremiah and that from Luke's gospel read in this liturgy is that it is to the extent that we really learn to trust and to hope in the Lord that we come to experience the gentle joy of the beatitudes quietly poured into our hearts. It is as we place our trust and hope in God that we are given to experience true happiness, the grace of blessing and blessedness which these *Sayings* announce. I am sure that if we were to reflect upon our personal experience we would discover this to be confirmed for us.

In contrast, I am pretty sure that we would come to see that those deep-seated sentiments of dissatisfaction and disappointment which menace our lives at certain moments are more often than not rooted in our tendency to cling to ourselves alone... our propensity to be purely self-centred at times.

As long as our trust, hope and expectation is placed in our self alone we will never know real peace or true happiness, for these gifts are essentially graces – blessings to be received which stem from communion with God and with others.

While it is easy to talk of the importance of trust and hope in our lives (as I am doing this morning), it is much harder for us to nurture and hold on to these attitudes at all times.

Trust and hope are real areas of struggle in so many people's lives; and, truth be told, in our own! For a whole host of reasons, we can find it hard to hope in God and to trust in others – and also, it has to be admitted, to honestly believe in our own true self, our own fundamental goodness.

Why do we struggle so much to trust and to hope?

Why do we find it hard to believe in God's goodness, other people's goodness and our own innate goodness?

Usually the difficulties we experience here stem back to unfortunate, negative, destructive, de-structuring experiences – wounds and hurts we have suffered along life's way, disappointments and deceptions that have been part of our experience. Pain endured in the past can leave us mistrustful, always on our guard, ever somewhat suspicious – even of God!

Who among us has not been let down at some time in our past in one way or another?

As we think of painful moments of our past – instances in which we discovered that our trust in another person was misplaced and, as a result, our hopes were painfully dashed – we can be tempted to conclude that it would be better never to leave ourselves open to being caught out in such a way again. We may foolishly conclude that it would be wiser never to take the risk of trusting in another person anew or ever really hoping for anything good in life.

Such thoughts can affect our relational lives in a very negative way. At a certain level, we can be tempted, as it were, to immunise ourselves to avoid the risks involved in living relationships as they should be lived: in an open, trusting, confident way, in a spirit of hope.

When we have stopped trusting and lost hope we have given into to Satan's wiles.

What the Tempter managed to damage in our first parents in the Garden of Eden was their initial confidence of heart. Satan sowed seeds of doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve – seeds which grew into an attitude of mistrust of God, which also affected their relationship each one to their self and both of them with each other.

That no one and no thing can be trusted is a lie by which Satan still likes to hold humans bound.

Fair enough, it may well be that our hopes have been dashed in the past; it may well be that promises made to us were broken and, as a result, our trust was betrayed, but, this should not halt us from trusting and hoping ever again.

Neither should our own struggles to keep the promises we have made to God and to others – those promises in whose regard we may well have failed on occasion – so destabilise and discourage us that these past failures hold us back from ever exercising a properly adjusted trust in ourselves again.

I dare to suggest that when the disappointments we feel in regard to God, ourselves and others are so exaggerated that they take on a proportion far beyond what we realise to be normal, this a sure sign that we have placed our trust and our hope in the wrong place – and/or certainly posed it in the wrong way.

In this respect, Jeremiah's words of warning heard in today's first reading are limpid; they are as clear as spring water. The prophet's message ties in with both the *woes* and *beatitudes* of today's gospel passage. Let's listen again to what the prophet has to say in regard to the *woes* that befall us when we fail to trust in God as we are called to do:

*The Lord says this:*

*'A curse on the man who puts his trust in man,  
who relies on things of flesh.*

*Whose heart turns from the Lord.*

*He is like dry scrub in the wastelands:*

*if good comes, he has no eyes for it,  
he settles in the parched places of the wilderness,  
a salt land uninhabited.*

Here the prophet warns us that the reason why our hopes are dashed is that we foolishly place them in man alone – leaving God out of the equation. At the end of the day, it is our failure to

remember God's place in our lives; our failure to give God His place at the heart of our existence, and in all our relationships with others, that leaves us feeling disappointed, for we fail to factor in the One who alone gives meaning to all things.

The prophet next goes on to speak the following words which point us in the direction of the blessing sayings of today's gospel passage:

*A blessing on the man who puts his trust in the Lord,  
with the Lord for his hope.*

*He is like a tree by the waterside that thrusts its roots to the stream:  
when the heat comes it feels no alarm,  
its foliage stays green;  
it has no worries in the year of drought,  
and never ceases to bear fruit.*

What Jeremiah's words draw to our attention here is that true joy, real beatitude, blessing, happiness, fullness of life, rich abundance – all these graces which we really long for – are found only when we put God at the centre of everything; only when we turn our lives over to Him, trusting Him completely, placing all our hope in His grace, relying solely on His providence. Jeremiah says here what the psalmist proclaims more than once in his prayer collection: *Those who hope in the Lord will not be disappointed.*

The lesson for us should be clear. It is this. When we place *all* our hope in other people – forgetting God's place at the heart of everything, and, to begin with, every true human relationship – then we leave ourselves wide open to disappointment. To think that we alone can give ourselves what we most ardently long for – life in happiness – or to look primarily to others to fulfil this deepest of hopes and expectations carried in our hearts we resemble people looking for a tree to flourish in a barren desert. It just won't happen; it can't happen! As long as we fail to factor God into our lives our deepest longings, hopes and expectations – our most ardent hungers and thirst – will never be satisfied.

The image the prophet uses – that of the tree planted in the ground – is one that speaks to us of the importance of nourishment for our lives; it speaks to us of the importance of our being firmly rooted and planted in Christ, our lives properly nourished by prayer – especially the prayer of God's word and not least the message of the gospels. Only thus will we ever be able to live our lives as we are called to: in the Spirit of Christ, in the spirit of the beatitudes.

When we come to see that the Lord is at the heart of everything that befalls us; that His providence is at work in all things; when our deepest hope and firmest trust is placed in the Lord, our lives understood as entirely in His care, then we come to know that grace of well-being which the beatitudes promise us. We feel sustained and upheld, when otherwise we would be devastated.

As we listen to the words of blessing we hear pronounced by Jesus in the *Beatitude Sayings* proclaimed in today's gospel, may we be encouraged to live our lives in *holy hope* and firm trust. May we experience deep within our hearts an awakening to the joy they announce. May deep gratitude rise up within our hearts and become a prayer of thanksgiving in this Eucharist.

Seeing all things in the light of the beatitudes, may we come to see that *all is grace* in our lives – including those passages through the *school of suffering* which have been part of our existence and which have contributed to forming and *fashioning Christ within us*.

By the help of God's grace may each one of us gathered here this morning come to our *full stature in Christ*, so that we may enjoy with Him and in Him, that abundance of life in well-being which He came into this world to share with us.

I leave the last word to Jesus: *I came that you may all have life and have it in abundance!*