

THE SERMON ON THE PLAIN St Alban's 3 November 2019

Luke 6:20-31

All Souls. (Repentant souls in purgatory) Faithful in Catholic are the baptised: All Saints – churches triumphant saints in heaven

The Sermon on the Plain is directed towards those who 'came to hear' Jesus (Luke 6:17). It was 'toward His disciples' that Jesus first lifted up His eyes (Luke 6:20). These are words for those already committed to building upon the rock (Luke 6:47-48).

"And He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples and said -" (Luke 6:20). Jesus addresses THEM as "Blessed poor"; "Blessed who hunger now"; "Blessed who weep now" (Luke 6:20-21). Then He begins to say, "Blessed are ye (all) when -"; "Rejoice ye (all) in that day - for your great reward in heaven" (Luke 6:22-23). Status for the faithfully departed.

The word used for "Blessed" here, as in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:1-12), speaks of an already existing state of existence. To be blessed is to be endowed with divine favour. It is to be proclaimed holy. 'The Blessed' is who we are in Christ.

Although we are not told that Jesus shifted His gaze, each of these blessings is balanced with a corresponding "woe" against their opposite (Luke 6:24-26). The word "woe" speaks of God's displeasure, arising from a wrong standing with God.

"The poor" (Luke 6:20) corresponds with 'the poor in spirit' (Matthew 5:3; cf. Isaiah 66:2). Such people, says Jesus, are already in possession of the kingdom of God. The poverty spoken of here is not lack of bread or of rice. It refers rather to that humility of spirit which recognises our emptiness without Christ.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:24). Think of the rich man in the parable, to whom Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things' (Luke 16:25). The rich man was not condemned to hell because of his riches, but rather for his missed opportunities. He had every opportunity to show compassion to the poor man at his gate but does not appear to have done so.

Those who hunger now (Luke 6:21) again balances with 'those who hunger and thirst after righteousness' (Matthew 5:6). Such people, says Jesus, shall be filled. The Christian character is shaped by our relationship with Jesus, our continual supping with Him in word and sacrament, prayer and devotion.

“But woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger” (Luke 6:25). Those who imagine themselves to have no need of Christ are sent away empty (Luke 1:53).

Again, those who weep now (Luke 6:21) corresponds to ‘those who mourn’ (Matthew 5:4). Those who weep tears of true repentance in this life, for example, have their consolation both in the here and now - and in eternity where ‘God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes’ (Revelation 21:4).

But woe to the opposite, whose time of mourning and weeping is yet to come (Luke 6:25)!

The extended Beatitude at the end of the sequence addresses the circumstance of persecution against the Church (Luke 6:22-23; cf. Matthew 5:11-12). It is similar to the way that Israel treated the prophets (cf. Acts 7:51-53). It is hard to go through such things, but, just as in our text, “the Son of Man” presences Himself with us in the midst of them.

The last “woe” of this sequence is, “Woe when men speak well of you. For so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). This speaks to us of the danger of desiring the praise of men, as opposed to acceptance with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not told what that woe entails, but it must surely be the opposite of the “great reward in heaven” mentioned above (Luke 6:23).

“Love those hostile to you,” says Jesus (Luke 6:27).

Jesus has already indicated that He is fully aware that His followers will face persecution (Luke 6:22). “DO GOOD to those who hate you,” He says. “BLESS those who curse you. PRAY for those who spitefully use you” (Luke 6:27-28). Throughout these two verses the word “you” is in the plural: in other words “‘ye all’ who hear” (Luke 6:27), collectively.

Then He turns to the singular, personalising the situation. If anyone strikes “you” on the cheek; takes away “your” cloak; to everyone who asks “you”, give; takes away what is “yours” &c. (Luke 6:29-30).

Reverting to the plural of “you”, Jesus presents His version of the ‘Golden Rule’. This is not ‘tit for tat’, but pre-emptive. “According as you desire men do to you, you also do to them in like manner” (Luke 6:31).

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