

Gospel: Luke 6:20-26

Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for the Kingdom of God is yours.
Blessed are you who are now hungry,
for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who are now weeping,
for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you,
and when they exclude and insult you,
and denounce your name as evil
on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!
Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.
For their ancestors treated the prophets
in the same way.

But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
But woe to you who are filled now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will grieve and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

Homily: Let Us Be One in Christ

I'm sure you know that there are two sets of Beatitudes in the Scriptures, those in Matthew and those in Luke. Matthew's are the Sermon on the Mount. Luke's Beatitudes are the sermon on the plane. Matthew's Beatitudes begin with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Luke's Beatitudes, which we just heard, "Blessed are you who are poor."

As I was praying over this Scripture this morning, there was a call for us to see the poor as blessed and to see ourselves in our own poverty and our own struggles as blessed. To see them as God sees them. To look at the poor around us through God's eyes and what Jesus says very directly in today's Gospel is, Blessed are the Poor.

It reminded me of a theme of Mother Teresa of Calcutta's preaching, Saint Mother Teresa. She would say she saw Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor. That underlined her ministry so that when she looked at the poor in society she didn't just see poor people, she saw Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor. Or I was reminded of something that Cardinal George said when

he was speaking to a group of benefactors for the Archdiocese of Chicago, he said, "We need the poor, to keep us from going to hell."

That was rather a strong statement from Cardinal George. What he meant by that was, if we live simply inside the bubble of privilege, then our relationship with God isn't honest, it's not exposed to the full reality of life. It's when we rub up against the poor, when we have direct contact with them, that it bursts the bubble and we see the wider context for how the gospel is applied. We see the challenge of Jesus calling us to say, "Blessed are the poor."

The other challenging reading that we have today is from St. Paul and he warns us about not simply being preoccupied with the things below, but to raise our eyes to heaven. What are the things below? It's the stuff that we worry about day in and day out. It's all the everyday stuff of life and it is important. He isn't saying: Don't think about that. But he is saying don't become preoccupied by that because it's passing; it's not going to last. What is going to last, is the strength of the Gospel. And then he ends with this tremendous call to unity. He said, "We are one in Christ." And then he said we are no longer circumcised nor uncircumcised; we are neither Jew nor Greek; male or female. We are one Christ. Slave or free? We are one in Christ.

Paul is naming the hot button tickets of his age and saying there's something more important than the hot tickets and that's our unity in Christ. Because you know the early church was divided in terms of: Do you have to become circumcised to accept the Gospel or not? This was a major controversy in the early church, but it's a yawner today. Nobody's worried about circumcision today, but 2,000 years ago that was the hot button ticket.

The other hot button ticket was how do you deal with slaves. The other issue was how do you integrate Greek culture and Jewish culture. A major source of division within the church and we inherit that today because the Greek speaking Jews had one set of Scripture and the Hebrew speaking Jews ended up with another and that translates to the Protestant Bible today and the Catholic Bible today. So in one sense, we're still involved in that controversy, but St. Paul says our unity in Christ has to transcend those differences. We have to see ourselves as one in Christ.

Let's put that in the context of today. One of the hot button issues that we are struggling with right now is immigration. President Trump made a very controversial decision in terms of ending the DACA program and giving Congress 60 days to enact immigration reform. Our church leaders have spoken out unanimously on the importance of applying the principles of Catholic social teaching to this hot button issue. Pope Francis hasn't spoken extensively on that but he did say that if we're pro-life, and I hope that all of us would consider ourselves to be pro-life, that doesn't just mean that we're against abortion. It does mean that, but it doesn't *just* mean that. It means that we protect life from conception to natural death and every stage in between. When Pope Francis was flying back from his recent visit to Columbia he said that if we're pro-life, we have to be pro-family and that impacts directly our need for immigration reform within this country, because our present policies are ripping apart families. Which is why the bishops have been so unanimous in saying we need immigration reform.

I was touched that five years ago Time magazine did an issue on the dreamers, the some 800,000 undocumented children who were brought to this country illegally by their parents and who have grown up in this country. Five years ago Time magazine profiled 30 of them. They revisited them and they re-profiled them. It was inspiring to read in the face of tremendous odds and living with great uncertainty in this country, how many of them have really made something of their lives. Through education, through working for social justice, working as artists, as educators, as teachers. One of them working as the first undocumented lawyer in the state of New York. Another one working as the first undocumented congressional aide. They've worked their way into the fabric of society. These 800,000 people we're talking about. There is a political dimension to the Gospel and we can't escape that. Our bishops have been strong in calling for immigration reform.

Our own Cardinal Cupich said:

"An immediate first step for our leaders is to pass legislation that will protect those previously covered by the DACA program while they deal with the long overdue comprehensive reform of our immigration system. They must be guided by compassion and respect for human dignity and honestly consider the substantial evidence that deporting these young Americans will do great economic harm to the states in which they reside. With the bishops in this country we remain committed to upholding the dignity of all persons and the fundamental right of all to live free from fear in a nation founded on that promise."

That's Cardinal Cupich's statement. The Catholic bishops have issued a similarly strong statement and the head of the Jesuits in the United States, Fr Tim Kesicki who is the head of the Jesuit conference, wrote this:

"We call upon Congress to act without delay in enacting a lasting solution. But more than ever we commit ourselves to living out God's law, which calls on us to love the stranger; remembering that our ancestors and faith were once strangers in a foreign land."

These are challenging words. Perhaps you're saying, "Fr Michael why are you getting political?" Or Fr Michael, "Why are the bishops getting political? Why is the Pope getting political?"

Why did St. John Chrysostom get political? Because Jesus got political. Why was Jesus executed? He was executed by the Romans because they claim that he was setting himself up as King. That was the charge: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." From the Jewish perspective he was violating the law. Our Jesus was a controversial figure in his time and if the gospel is challenging us, if it isn't rubbing up against us, then I think there's something wrong. Then we're not hearing the gospel. Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, Woe to us who are rich.

These are challenging words. Let's pray that our heart be open to hear and them.

Amen. (Amen.)