

### **Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023**

In the Gospel of this morning, the speech of Jesus seems strange and opposed to the normal and usual way we consider things. For instance, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who are hungry, blessed are those who are persecuted, blessed are those who are insulted, ..." That is not the way we consider happiness to be. For our world to be happy is to have our dreams and aspirations met, to be out of problems and difficulties, to have plenty for the stomach, to be at peace and without concern, to be spared from tears and joyful, etc.

What is the point of all this? For Jesus, happiness considered exclusively in human terms as human satisfaction of one's needs and desires, or protection against what can upset and harm, is fragile. It flees like the shadow of a tree under the sun. It leaves the taste of dissatisfaction and no-fulfilment. The joy it brings is for a while, then, thirst and hunger come again.

True happiness is that which comes from God and for which God is the foundation. It exceeds the mere human conditions and points to something eternal. It does not aim at an immediate satisfaction of human gratifications, but rather at the fulfillment of the deepest longings of the soul. Happiness that has God as a source can be found even in poverty and pain, suffering and loss, sorrow and mourning, hunger and persecution, etc.

What comes at the term of pain, suffering, loss, mourning, hunger, insult and persecution lived with God, instead of being the degradation of a human being or his disfiguration, is his elevation. It is God himself who is met as an ultimate reality and reward of the one who has been faithful to him in those difficult circumstances.

Then, it makes sense to say, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of God; Blessed are those who mourn, they will be comforted; Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the land; Blessed are the hungry and thirsty of justice, they will be satisfied; Blessed are the merciful, they will be shown mercy; Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God; Blessed are those persecuted and insulted for the sake of God, theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

They are blessed not because life has been easy with them, but rather because in spite of all the difficult situations in which they found themselves they did not abandon God. They recognized God as the source that gives meaning to their lives and without whom life would have any sense at all. Like a rower who hangs at his boat in the midst of the tempest, they did not give up on God even in the darkest moments of their lives.

Such a way of living is contrary to the standard by which we usually define happiness. Thus, God's happiness defies the principles of human reasoning; it transcends human logic; it sets limits to what is humanly conceivable and opens our mind to an upper reality, which is the kingdom of God. The poor, the misfortunate, the mistreated, the suffering and the persecuted have an assurance that they stand at the right side of history by choosing God and his ways of life. By their faith in Jesus, God is transforming their situation into something bigger than they have ever imagined.

If we too accept to walk such a road, we will enjoy the friendship of God and will have access his Kingdom. As the Prophet Zephaniah told the people of Israel in the first reading, seek justice; seek humility so that you might be sheltered on the day of Lord's judgement. Observe the law, speak no lies, then, you will pasture and couch your flocks with no one to disturb them.

Because God is the source of true happiness, his involvement in our life leads to the discovery of our true identity as children of God. Our connection to him brings us the peace of heart that the world cannot give, both inwardly and outwardly. His concern for us gives us an assurance that whatever the circumstances surrounding our life, be they of joy or of sorrow, we are not alone.

This is how the just, the saints and the martyrs have lived and encountered God. Those who are pure of heart, meek, merciful, peaceful... hold the foretaste of heaven in their hands as the life of God dwells within them.

Anytime we strive to live spiritually poor in this age of consumerism, we are building the kingdom of heaven where God will enrich us who put our material and worldly successes at the feet of Jesus. Anytime we share tears in our pains and suffering without revolting against God, we are sure that we will be comforted, because that day God will wipe away every tear from our face.

Anytime we work hard in order to change ourselves in becoming meek, gentle and kind, we are preparing our heritage, because by striving for purity of heart, mind and body, we will see God face to face. Anytime, we spend our energy to work for justice and peace between families, peoples and nations, we are building God's kingdom, because that day we will be recognized as God's children.

Anytime we forgive the wrong done to us and we allow others to reconcile with us and with one another, we prepare God's blessing upon us, because that day God will, in turn, be merciful with us. Anytime we accept to be insulted, persecuted and slandered because of Jesus, we have to rejoice and be glad, because that day we will be rewarded for our fidelity.

Is not this way of happiness that Jesus proposes seemingly foolish? Well, that is exactly what St Paul says, namely that God has chosen what seems to be foolish in the world in order to shame the wise, what is weak in the world in order to shame the strong, and what is lowly and despised in the world in order to reduce to nothing those who are something so that no human being may boast before God.

May Jesus help us embrace the way of the beatitudes so that we come one day to the Kingdom of his Father! May he help us to be humble by grounding everything we do in this world upon his Father and not upon ourselves! May God bless you all!

**Zephaniah 2: 3; 3: 12-13; 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31; Matthew 5: 1-12**



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