

Recent Homilies: Deacon Dennis Ferguson, homilist

6th Sunday, Cycle C
14 February 2010

For many of us, the Beatitudes I just read, don't quite seem correct. That is because we are more familiar with Matthew's Beatitudes. I just read the gospel according to Luke. Luke writes "Blessed are you who are poor", whereas Matthew writes, "Blessed are you who are poor in spirit". Luke says, "Blessed are you who hunger", while Matthew offers, ". . . those who hunger for what is right."

The reason for this is that Luke directed his Gospel to the very poor of his time, especially the early, deprived, gentile Christians, whereas Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jewish people of his time, including the very rich.

Matthew is said to have "spiritualized" Luke's version.

Looking at another way, Luke's "poor" use their poverty as their vehicle to get closer to God, just as Matthew's "poor in spirit" are those people who use their wealth to draw them closer to God

I recently saw a TV program on Alaska which studied one of the most remote, isolated villages on the North American continent. It was a village without TV, without supermarkets, without motor cars, plumbing or mechanical heating. It was a village situated in the most rugged environment imaginable.

Some would call it "uncivilized."

The people were poor. Food, clothing, shelter — everything they needed for survival — had to be acquired under the most difficult physical conditions.

But, in spite of the harshness of their environment, the people managed somehow to sustain themselves. More importantly for us, as we reflect on today's Gospel, they were blessed with an undeniable spirit of contentment, of serenity, of a sense of community. The tough conditions under which they lived kept them close together. The day-to-day struggle for survival taught them lessons of mutual dependence, trust, sharing that we, in our "civilized" world, often times never learn. Moreover, they were a blessed people, a happy people. They were poor in both economic terms and poor in spirit — but they were "blessed."

Luke's Beatitudes should sharpen our insight into the human side of Jesus.

Jesus looked at those on the bottom rung of the economic ladder and compared them with those who were better off financially. And He saw a quality of life in the former (the poor) that was not apparent in the latter (the rich). He saw how excessive concentration on getting more money, more power, more status, more goods can harden the human spirit. He saw how excessive preoccupation with the accumulation of wealth can divide and separate people, resulting in the situation we have in today's world — where the many have too little and the few have too much. Jesus never condemned money and riches as such. It was what people did with those riches that counted.

In the third Beatitude, Jesus speaks to poor and rich alike: "Happy are you who weep now: you shall laugh". Equity and justice demand that the poor shall not weep alone. Equity and justice demand a personal identification with God's poor by us. Equity and justice demand sincere lamenting by the few with much – us – over the plight of the many with little. "Happy are you, blessed are you who weep now," Jesus says. Happy are you who willingly share in the plight, the pain, the misery of others.

These are times which cry out for us to be the kind of people Jesus describes as "blessed," "happy." These are times which cry out for us to see the world through the eyes of the disadvantaged. These are times which cry out for us to weep over injustice, hatred, violence and oppression in all their ugly forms. "Blessed are those who weep **and act** now."

In these tough economic times, when all of our budgets are stretched, Blessed are those who weep, but still donate food to the food pantry so a family in West Hartford can eat.

Blessed are those who weep for the homeless man who will sleep under the Route 84 bridge because the homeless shelters are full.

Blessed are those who weep and speak out against discrimination towards our gay brothers and lesbian sisters.

Blessed are those who weep and act to end prejudice against a person because of the color of their skin.

Blessed are those who weep and act to end abortion, the death penalty, and the rape of the environment.

Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh.
Rejoice and behold for your reward will be great in heaven.