

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time: February 17, 2019

“A Strange Blessedness: The Surprising Wisdom of God”

Readings: Jeremiah 17: 5-8, Psalm 1 (selections), 1 Corinthians 15: 12, 16-20, Luke 6: 17, 20-26

Most of us love to read and hear stories with happy endings. We know that these stories don't always go smoothly; they involve effort, transformation and often surprise.

This weekend we celebrate President's Day. Certainly, politics isn't always known for happy endings, but nevertheless we celebrate those leaders of our country who transform society by bravely addressing the societal issues of their day. In turbulent times and against strong headwinds, our bravest leaders refuse to give into or create fears, and instead, seek something more. They work for greater justice and a more equitable pursuit of a peaceful life for all.

This week also brings a meeting of Pope Francis with Presidents of the bishop's conferences from around the world to address the prevention of abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. It is our prayer as a church that this be the beginning of a positive outcome bringing greater justice, transparency and accountability to our church.

While most of us aren't dealing with matters of church or state, each one of us face our own challenges and decisions. Today's readings for this Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time remind us to rely not exclusively on worldly wisdom and authority, but on the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we consider and weigh in on the critical issues of the day as well as the daily decisions of our lives.

The Prophet Jeremiah reminds us that we have choices to make. We are told that you and I are to put God first in our lives and not act on falsehoods. We can bring about the Kingdom and abundant human flourishing of mind, body and spirit, which allows healing to happen. We do that when we as God's chosen people:

- Serve God with our gifts in unique ways to collaboratively address the issues and needs of our day, and
- Speak the truth with bravery and integrity,

- When we listen, and when we
- Act on the Word of God and God's standards and trust in God's ways.

Our alliance with God's grace and healing is reason for hope as we come to this Eucharist to be nourished and challenged by God's Word and the Body and Blood of Christ.

The reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians and all of the 15th chapter contains the earliest accounts of the importance of the Resurrection of Jesus and stresses the primacy of the resurrection, it assures us of the "sure and certain expectation of the resurrection to a better life through our death."

Life on earth involves change, conversion and an openness to new ways of living, acting and loving. This change can happen by allowing the love of God to transform us, and by not giving in to the fears and challenges of our present day. With hope in an everlasting future with God, we are promised a happy ending to our life's story.

Our Gospel from Luke describes the story and call of the first disciples, emphasizing God's word as authoritative. It is important for us to respond to the opportunity and challenge to build the reign of God, to build the Kingdom, in our world today. We do this by discerning and responding to the needs of the times for the people of God. Today challenges us to address affordability and access to health for all and so many other societal issues. We are called to be open and creative to new ways and strategies to address these issues.

The Sermon on the Plain unveils Jesus' strange idea of blessedness. He has a strange list of woes and promotes a different dream; the kingdom of God and a great reward in heaven. The Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Plain are reversals of fortune.

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.

The Scriptures this morning remind us that's God's ways are not ours. God's wisdom can look foolish in the eyes of the world and the reign of God will not be what we expect. This message is a challenge to us to live our lives intentionally, building and celebrating the reign of God each day by loving the poor, the hungry, the weeping, those who are outcast and destitute. We must live with hope in the Lord and trust in the promise of his resurrection.

Are we doing the work of including those who are outside of our society?
Are we witnessing to the truth that there is more to life than human successes?
Are we too concerned with our own comforts and happiness to be bothered with the plight of the poor and marginalized?

As the church we are committed to remain steadfast in serving the needs of all, especially the poor and vulnerable in both private and public ways, as individuals and as a civic community. We must support the programs that support the least among us. Medicaid helps balance healthcare costs for those among us with the greatest need. More than half of our elders in nursing homes, the veterans who have served our county, half of all births and nearly forty percent of all children in our country are covered. In the gospel we are challenges to rethink our notion of blessing and expand circles of care. As the people of God living in a political society we must bring our values to the public forum, speaking in ways the ensure safeguards for all and protect the common good.

Let us be inspired in our efforts by those among us who live it every day. The church's health care ministry in the United States has a joint statement of its commitments. This statement affirms that " ... Catholic health care is rooted in our belief that every person is a treasure, every life a sacred gift, every human being a unity of body, mind and spirit."

In all we do, may we be inspired to live the word of God and the Beatitudes; to work and bring to life the Gospel vision of justice and peace, and to answer God's call to foster healing, act with compassion and promote wellness for all persons and communities, with special attention to our neighbors who are poor, underserved and most vulnerable. By our service of love, we will transform the hurt of the world today into hope.

May our work together and service to the least among us make of us those blessed by God for following holy wisdom.



Homily – February 17, 2019

*Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose hope is the LORD.*

*He is like a tree planted beside the waters
that stretches out its roots to the stream:
it fears not the heat when it comes;
its leaves stay green;
in the year of drought it shows no distress,
but still bears fruit.*

Fr. Tim Bushy