

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time —Year C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Reading I

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Thus says the LORD:

Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings,
who seeks his strength in flesh,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.

He is like a barren bush in the desert
that enjoys no change of season,
but stands in a lava waste,
a salt and empty earth.

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.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 & 6

R (40:5a) **Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.**

Blessed the man who follows not
the counsel of the wicked,
nor walks in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the company of the insolent,
but delights in the law of the LORD
and meditates on his law day and night.

R **Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.**

He is like a tree
planted near running water,
that yields its fruit in due season,
and whose leaves never fade.

Whatever he does, prospers.

R **Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.**

Not so the wicked, not so;
they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
For the LORD watches over the way of the just,
but the way of the wicked vanishes.

R **Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.**

Reading II

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Brothers and sisters:

If Christ is preached as raised from the dead,
how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?
If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised,
and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain;
you are still in your sins.

Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.
If for this life only we have hoped in Christ,
we are the most pitiable people of all.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Alleluia

Luke 6:23ab

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Rejoice and be glad;
your reward will be great in heaven.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Luke 6:17, 20-26

Jesus came down with the Twelve
and stood on a stretch of level ground
with a great crowd of his disciples
and a large number of the people
from all Judea and Jerusalem
and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon.
And raising his eyes toward his disciples he 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.

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.”

Exegesis

Jeremiah 17:5-8

The Prophet Jeremiah was born in the year 650 B.C. in a small town of Anathoth just north of Jerusalem. He received his call to ministry as a prophet of Yahweh at the age of twenty-two in the year 628 during the reign of King Josiah. This was a turbulent time in both a political and a religious sense. Politically the great Assyrian Empire was on the decline and Babylon was on the rise. In the year 612 the Nineveh, the capital of Assyria fell to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar, the warrior king of Babylon, carried off the first exiles from Jerusalem in the year 597. Jerusalem itself was destroyed in 587. Jeremiah remained in the rubble of Jerusalem for a time before he was deported into Egypt where he was murdered by his own people.

At the time that Jeremiah entered the scene there was widespread religious decline, idolatry and infidelity to Yahweh was the norm. In the year 622 the Book of the Law was discovered in the Temple and Josiah led sweeping religious reforms bringing true cultic worship of Yahweh back to Jerusalem and Judah. The king had all the altars to foreign gods destroyed. The Prophet Jeremiah set the stage for this reform and was incredibly supportive of Josiah's actions.

In 609 King Josiah was killed in a battle at Megiddo. After his death idolatry swiftly returned to Israel and Judah. The territory was under Egyptian influence. King Neco of Egypt deposed Jehoahaz, king of the Northern Kingdom, and carried him off into captivity in Egypt. He then replaced him with Jehoiakim who reigned until 598 when he died, and his son Jehoiachin took over. The young king Jehoiachin was swiftly exiled into Babylon in 597 and King Nebuchadnezzar replaced him with Zedekiah who reigned until the fall of Jerusalem in 587.

Our pericope from the 17th Chapter was promulgated during the years after the death of King Josiah, during the reign of King Jehoiakim leading up to the first deportation to Babylon in 597.

The writings of the Prophet Jeremiah influenced *The Prophet Ezekiel*, *The Psalms*, and *Second Isaiah*. Our passage today would have inspired Psalm 1, our psalm selection this weekend.

Early in his writings, Jeremiah reveals God to be the source of life using the image of *living waters*. "Two evils have my people done: they have forsaken Me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water." (Jer 2:13). Again, immediately following our pericope the prophet writes: "O hope of Israel, O Lord, all who forsake you shall be in disgrace: the rebels of the land shall be put to shame; they have forsaken the source of living waters, the Lord." (Jer 17:13). In his Gospel, the beloved disciple John will quote Jesus several times using this image of living waters, e.g. the Samaritan Woman at the well. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for *hope* is *miqweh*, which also means *pool*, as in a pool of water.

The image of Yahweh as living water provides insight for the images of our selected passage today. Our pericope is titled *True Wisdom*. The opposite of true wisdom is the "man who trusts in human beings, who seeks strength in his flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord." (Jer 17:5). "He is like the barren bush in the desert..." (Jer 17:6). In contrast to the barren bush, which is dying and unable to bear fruit, the green tree is a biblical symbol for life. (See Ps 52:10; Prov 3:18, 11:13; Sir 24:13). True wisdom is the man who trusts in the Lord, who remains connected to the *living waters*. Connected to the source and sustainer of life one can remain alive and flourishing even in times of drought and trouble.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 & 6

Psalm 1 consists of six verses. It is titled *True Happiness in God's Law*. Psalm 1 sets the stage for the 149 psalms that follow. It contrasts the choice between God and all that is not God. The psalm reveals two separate ways or paths that lie before every human being. One is a path to happiness and the fulness of life, life eternal, and the other road leads to death and ruin, quite literally a dead-end road.

The Hebrew word translated as happy or blessed is *asre* which is pronounced *ash rae*. There is no equivalent in Hebrew or Aramaic for the Greek word *makarios* which is also translated into English as *blessed*. Having said that, *asre* would definitely be the closest equivalent to *makarios*. Both *asre* and *makarios* are often translated as *happy* or *fortunate*, however, they mean something much deeper than that.

Asre appears forty-four times in Hebrew Scripture, most often in the Psalms. It describes a state of being, a bliss or a blessedness, or a peace and contentment that comes from being in right relationship with God, somehow sharing in the life of God who is love. The word *asre* introduces the *Book of Psalms* and appears thirty-six times. Examples are as follows: "Blessed (*asre*) are those who...the law of the Lord is their delight." (Ps 1:1). "Blessed (*asre*) are those who take refuge in God." (Ps 2:12). "Blessed (*asre*) the sinner whose fault is removed, whose sin is forgiven. Blessed (*asre*) those to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no deceit. (Ps 32: 1-2). "Blessed (*asre*) the nations whose God is the Lord, the people chosen as His very own." (Ps 33:12). "Learn to savor how good the Lord is; blessed (*asre*) are those who take refuge in Him." (Ps 34:9). "Blessed (*asre*) are those whose trust is in the Lord, who turn not to idolatry or to those who stray after falsehood." (Ps 40:5). Blessed (*asre*) are those concerned for the lowly and poor; when misfortune strikes the Lord delivers them. (Ps 41:2). These are just seven examples taken from the Psalms. Note in each example that God is the source of this state of blessedness. (See exegesis on the Gospel for a discussion on the word *makarios*).

The *Book of Psalms* begins by confronting us with the fundamental choice afforded to us by the gift of freewill. It is about love and love must be free. The way of life and the way of death are best articulated in *Deuteronomy*: "Here, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom... I have set before you life and death, the blessing, and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God. heeding His voice and holding fast to Him." (Deut 30: 15, 19).

The way of life depends on our connection with the source of life, living waters, God. We can choose to grow our roots along the stream of God's grace, or we can choose to grow our roots in the desert of this world. The choice is ours, choose life, therefore!

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

In our passage from *1 Corinthians* St. Paul is addressing some arrant thinking among the fledgling Church at Corinth. The issue is stated clearly in the first verse of our pericope: “But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection from the dead?” (1 Cor 15:12). It is not surprising that the Church at Corinth would be influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. The Greek philosophers envisioned a separation of the soul from the body at death, i.e., the soul being set free from the fallen and darkened and transient corporeal realm. Among the Jews a small group of Sadducees also believed that there was no resurrection of the body.

St. Paul begins his argument for the resurrection of the body by focusing on the resurrection of Jesus. The Risen Lord appeared to Paul, the apostles and many others for a reason, to show us life beyond the grave. Jesus died on the Cross for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. There are many witnesses to these historical events. Jesus spent three days in the tomb to validate that His death was real. He rose from the dead and appeared in His glorified body, a body that was real and recognizable, with visible wounds from the Cross, yet He was able to appear in the Upper Room although the doors were locked. His appearances affirm the reality of the resurrection of the body.

Belief in bodily resurrection had already been revealed in the OT. “But the dead shall rise, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust.” (Is 26:19). “Thus says the Lord God to these bones: See! I will bring My Spirit into you that you may come to life.” (Ez 37: 5). Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; Some shall live forever; others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.” (Dan 12:2). “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever.” (2 Mac 7:9). Note that the earliest of these OT passages, i.e. from Isaiah, dates back to 740 B.C. The resurrection of the body to eternal life, while made visible in the Risen Lord, was not new to the Jewish faith.

When we think of the various resurrection appearances of Jesus we tend to focus on those appearances to the apostles and others as revealed in the four Gospels. These appearances all occur between the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus. After the Ascension, the Risen Lord also appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. St. Paul acknowledges his calling from the Lord, and like Peter, he too is aware of his own unworthiness. Perhaps this is particularly difficult for Paul in that he was violently attacking the early Church. Jesus makes no distinction between Himself and His Church when he exclaims, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4). Paul not only uses his experience of the Risen Lord in his arguments supporting the resurrection of the body, but he bases his authority on his personal calling from the Risen Lord, Himself.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 6:17, 20-26

In our Gospel scene, Jesus went up the mountain and spent the night in prayer. As morning arrived, He chose His twelve apostles. “And He came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A crowd of His disciples and a large number of people from all of Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases... (Lk 6:17:18). Tyre and Sidon is Gentile territory. This inclusivity is an ongoing theme of Luke. (See also 2:31-32; 3:6; 4:24-27).

Jesus uses the word “blessed.” It is translated from the Greek word, *markarios*. Speaking in Aramaic, Jesus would have probably had to inject this Greek word as there is no Aramaic equivalent. The Hebrew word *asre* is perhaps the closest equivalent, but it falls short of the true meaning of *makarios*. *Makarios*, at its origin, speaks of a state of being that has God as its source. Aristotle taught that we could experience this higher state of being by dying to ourselves in self-giving love. As we die to ourselves, we connect with the ground of our being, which is divine life, love itself. As we connect with this immutable force, we reach an anchor point that is unshakable and eternal. It is transformative grace that elevates our lives to a new state of being. It is the fullness of life that Jesus talks about. It is a selfless state of being that is described by Jesus in the Beatitudes.

Makarios appears throughout the Greek NT to describe a state of being that is divine in its origin. It is summed up best in the *Book of Revelation*: “I heard a voice from Heaven say, ‘Write this; Blessed (*Makarios*) are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ said the Spirit, ‘let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them.’”

The imagery of Jesus coming down from the mountain after a night of prayer evokes the scene of Moses who came down from the mountain and set the Law before the Israelites. (See Exod 19:20-23, 33; Deut 4:44, 26:19). Now it is Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the Law, wishes to write a higher law on our hearts. It is the law of Love, absolute self-giving love.

For you will be satisfied. The Greek word for *satisfied* is *chortazo* which is often translated as *filled* or *fulfilled* or *satisfied*. It appears in Luke in the Multiplication of Loaves: “They all ate and were *satisfied* (*chortazo*).” (Lk 9:17). The word appears again in Luke in the Story of Lazarus: “And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who gladly would have eaten his fill (*chortazo*) of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table.” (Lk 17:21).

Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! The Greek word translated as *rejoice* and *joy* is *chairō*. The Greek word translated as *leap* is *skirtao*. These words appear in the announcement of the birth of John: “And you will have joy (*chairō*) and gladness, and many will rejoice (*chairō*) at his birth.” Then they appear again in the Visitation: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped (*skirtao*) in her womb... For the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped (*skirtao*) for joy (*chairō*).” (Lk 1:41, 44). The presence and the movement of the Holy Spirit is felt flowing in and through Mary and Elizabeth and the infants in their wombs. It is the Kingdom of God at hand that is the cause for leaping and joy!

In the Beatitudes Jesus is teaching the Way of self-giving love. He is describing a state of being that we are called to live. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us are we able to attain this state. In the words of St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me.”

Reflection

Last weekend the theme that permeated the Word of God was the invasion of grace, the truth that God lavishly pours His grace upon the world. God's love is like a waterfall of life that never stops flowing. Often times this is symbolized by flow of living water, e.g. the life-giving water that flowed from the rock in the desert, the water that flowed from the temple in the vision of the Prophet Ezekiel, the promise of life-giving water at the well in Samaria, and the water that flowed from the pierced side of Jesus from the cross. It is a flow of love that flows indiscriminately and has no end. It is a love that seeks to invade our lives.

That love also will transform our lives and elevate our lives to a higher state of being. The theme that is woven through our readings this weekend is transformative grace. If we connect with this flow of divine life, it will transform our lives. The key is to be like the tree planted near the running stream, whose roots are tapped into and supplying life giving water to the tree. In times of plenty and in times of drought the tree is nourished by the living water.

In our second reading, St. Paul talks about this transformative grace manifesting itself in the power of the resurrection. He encourages us to anchor the foundation of lives in a divine power that transcends life in this world. In our Gospel this weekend Jesus teaches us to live in this elevated state of being. The beatitudes call us to rise above the worldly ideals and to live on a higher plain of being.

Jesus uses the word "blessed." It is translated from the Greek word, "makarios." Speaking in Aramaic Jesus would have had to inject this Greek word as there is no Aramaic equivalent. The word itself, at its origin, speaks of a state of being that has God as its source. Aristotle taught that we could experience this higher state of being by dying to ourselves in self-giving love. As we die to ourselves, we connect with the ground of our being, which is divine life, love itself. As we connect with this immutable force, we reach an anchor point that is unshakable and eternal. It is transformative grace that elevates our lives to a new state of being. It is the fullness of life that Jesus talks about.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.

In Christ,



Personal Witness

Over the years I can point to many spiritual breakthroughs that I experienced in my life. Most have come from a change in a previous way of thinking. There are several stories in the Gospels where we are told that the Heavens were opened, and God appears, or His voice is heard. Examples would be at the Baptism of Jesus or at the Transfiguration. At the moment that Jesus died we are told that the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. The heavens were opened, and death and sin are destroyed from above. I always viewed the opening of the heavens as Jesus opening the gates of Heaven, such that we may now enter into Heaven.

One Good Friday morning, several years ago, I was alone in a darkened church kneeling before the Crucifix. I had a vision of Jesus like the vision of St. Faustina. The side of Jesus opened before me, and I felt the warmth of blood and water flowing upon me. Then I had a vision of a waterfall, like that of Niagara Falls, flowing upon the world. The opening of the gates of Heaven took on a much deeper meaning from that moment on. I now see the gates opening and God's grace, God's living water flowing upon us. That water flows from the side of Christ today, from the Altar of Sacrifice, from the waters of Baptism, from the words of Reconciliation, from the Word of God proclaimed from the pulpit, from Christ and His Church.

The Prophet Jeremiah describes God as a river of living water. Jesus promised the Samaritan woman at the well that He would give her living water, such that she would never thirst again. "Jesus stood up and exclaimed, 'Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink, Whoever believes in Me, as scripture says: *Rivers of living water will flow within him.*' He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who believe in Him were to receive." (Jn 7: 37-38). Note that Jesus did not say a trickle of water will flow through you. He said RIVERS of living water will flow through us when we open ourselves to His Holy Spirit.

There is a lot of imagery in Sacred Scripture of a desert like world. Certainly, the image of the Israelites in the desert on the way to the Promised Land comes to mind. When they were dying of thirst Moses struck the Rock and living water flowed for them to drink. Later, St. Paul would tell us that the Rock was Christ. The vision of the dry bones by the Prophet Ezekiel provides us with an image of a people disconnected from the life-giving water that is God. As a part of His descent into humanity Jesus Himself spent forty days in the desert.

Years ago, in my prior life as a CPA, I was traveling in a small plane with a client. We were flying over an oil field that he had purchased in Wyoming. Our flight path took us over thousands of acres of rangeland and farmland. It happened that there was a terrible drought that summer, and fall was approaching with no relief. As I gazed down at the once fertile land it looked like a barren desert. Everything was brown, thousands of acres of crops were dead. Then we came upon a river that was winding through the landscape below. There was a ribbon of blue and on both sides of the river there was a narrow strip of green grass, shrubbery, and trees. It reminded me of the imagery from our Scripture this weekend of the tree planted near living water. It is a matter of life or death.

For each of us, that living water is near. It is closer to us than we are to ourselves. The gates of Heaven are opened, and we stand beneath the waterfall of Grace. The choice is ours. Choose life, therefore!

