

Readings

Jer 17:5-8

Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4, 6

1 Cor 15:12, 16-20

Lk 6:17, 20-26

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“Woe Are They!”

When we hear the Beatitudes from the memory of the community of Saint Luke, the Evangelist, in our Gospel today, we might ask, “Where are the other Beatitudes that we remember from the memory of the community of Saint Matthew, the Evangelist?” We probably remember the Matthean Beatitudes more easily because of the vivid scene of the Last Judgment that Saint Matthew also shares. As hearers of the Gospel, Saint Luke tries to remind us that the Beatitudes are calls from Jesus for action by confronting us with “woes” that we face if we are not living out the Beatitudes, if we don’t care for the hungry and thirsty as well as others in need here and now. In challenging us with “woes” Saint Luke helps us to not get lost in being “blessed” and “happy” only. We need to go beyond a sense of “Be ‘Happy’ Attitudes” that Dr. Robert Schuller, the televangelist, preached about in the 1980s and 1990s.

As we live in these barely post-pandemic times, we are easily looking for more moments of happiness and blessedness. The isolation and social distancing can lead us to focus on ourselves and our personal circumstances, especially our difficulties. We can easily say, “Woe is me!” This can be real and true, but it is only a problem if it distracts us from the needs of others and leads us away from also saying, “Woe are they!” Saying “Woe is me” is not a problem unless

it leads us to get stuck in a “pity party,” rather than helping us identify our own feelings of vulnerability and through that become aware of the vulnerability of those around us, and so lead us to live the Beatitudes in helping and sharing with the vulnerable. The vulnerable, in their “Woe is me,” may easily question if Jesus has saved us and is risen from the dead and if we will rise from the dead, just like some of the Christians of Corinth that Saint Paul wrote to in our Second Reading. When we have this question, we are losing a sense of Jesus Christ, who Saint Paul also tells us in his Letter to the Philippians, poured himself out and became as vulnerable as a slave, even showing his vulnerability by submitting to the shameful death on the cross. The pandemic should remind us of how vulnerable we all are and to see this as a connection to the vulnerable Jesus, our Savior.

With COVID continuing to add variants, we continue to wonder when, if ever, we will get back to normal. Even the expression “New Normal” keeps changing on us. The Gospel call to live the Beatitudes is so much more needed in these times of vulnerability. People have an ever greater need to know that “Christ is Risen!” For them the only way they may know the Risen Jesus is seeing us, as Christians, living the Beatitudes. In living the Beatitudes, they need to see Christ risen in us! Throughout the life of the Church this has been seen as “Being the Body of Christ.” Saint Augustine saw this as “Being the Body of Christ with others.” He saw this so vividly that when he preached (*Sermon 227* and *Sermon 272*) he said that saying, “Amen” to “The Body of Christ” when we receive Holy Communion is a commitment to be the Body of Christ with others in action, especially with the vulnerable who are for us the vulnerable Christ. Saint Augustine found the vulnerable Christ especially in the least and the lost. Living the Beatitudes in this way is showing our fellow Christians that God is With Us (Emmanuel)! Even though in these pandemic times we may need, on occasion, to practice masking and physical

social distancing, when we are Being the Body of Christ with Others there cannot be any spiritual masking or spiritual distancing. These are times that call us to find the strength to use our vulnerability to go deeper to be more spiritually connected to our vulnerable sisters and brothers, especially the least and the lost.

If we use our imaginations, our First Reading from Jeremiah and our Responsorial Psalm point out a direction to us on going deeper. These scripture passages give us the thoughts, “a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream,” and “a tree planted near running water.” These are variances of an image that should guide our spiritual life in striving to Live the Beatitudes and be the Body of Christ with Others in these pandemic times. With our heightened vulnerabilities, we need to be stretching our roots out even further to draw from the running waters of God’s love and grace to be able to share love and grace with others.

As spiritual trees experiencing difficulties, even drought, in these pandemic times, let us imagine:

- Are we planted in the best place to Live the Beatitudes, be the Body of Christ with Others?
- Or do we need to situate ourselves in a place closer to the streams of God’s grace and love?
- How can we be better at stretching out our roots to the streams of God’s grace and love to able to draw greater strength for our vulnerable selves as well as to share as the Body of Christ, here and now, with our vulnerable sisters and brothers?
- And how can we find in our own vulnerabilities ways to connect to the vulnerabilities of others as part of the vulnerable Christ together, and Live the Beatitudes of today’s Gospel reading by Being the Body of Christ with them?