

Homily  
January 29, 2023  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
25:15-36:49

It is somewhat unusual when the readings for a Sunday or a Holy Day all have threads that connect them. Usually, it's the First Reading and the Gospel. But today there are threads and they are these: **Humility** and **Blessings** coursing through each.

The prophet Zephaniah wrote at a time when there were only a few people left, "the remnant." Everyone else had been carried off. And you know that remnants are leftovers. And they're not always the most powerful. No. They are the weak, the ones most vulnerable. But the prophet assures them, if they live beyond what caused their being carried off – their idolatry and their self-sufficiency – that they would be a people humble and lowly, yes. But they would become "a beacon."

It carries on through Psalm 146, the Psalm we just sang, whose refrain was from *The Beatitudes*, our Gospel. In that Psalm we heard that the Lord cares for the humble and blesses them.

And then in First Corinthians we hear, "Not many of you are wise by human standards. Not many of you were powerful. Not many were of noble birth." No. You were lowly, humble and yet blessed, blessed by the Lord. And if you would boast, boast in the Lord.

And then finally, *The Beatitudes*: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who are first and foremost humble before the Lord.

Now the word "humble," or "humility," has the same root word as "human" and "humus." You know what humus is. It's that rich loamy dirt that will grow anything. We know from the story of Genesis, that the Lord took the dirt and created the human person. They are of the earth. They are alive in the Spirit of God. And if they keep in mind (we humans, that is) our origin and creation, then we will be humble.

In just twenty-some days we will have ashes put on our heads to remind us of that. "*Remember you are dust and unto dust you will return.*" Now that doesn't mean we're dirt, in the sense of "throw it out." No, we are full of worth because God has created us. All human beings have their worth because they are created by God. Now, it is true that a part of that worth, our worthiness, is lost through sin. But brothers and sisters, even today, when we say, "*I am not worthy that you should come under my roof...*" What's the next part? (Congregation responds: "*But only say the word and my soul shall be*

*healed.*”) We rely upon our worthiness before God in Christ Jesus who says the word. We have great worth because God has created us and we are worthy through Jesus Christ.

That’s humility, grasping that. Humility is not beating ourselves up and telling ourselves that we are nothing. We are something before the Lord. Something so much that he sent his son to redeem us.

Blessed. Another word for “blessed,” is “beatitude.” It comes from the Latin “*beatus*,” which means blessed, or happy. The Greek word, “*makarios*,” also means blessed, but divinely blessed. Originally it applied to the Greek gods. And then later applied to humanity, who was blessed through the gods. Now our Jewish ancestors knew “*beatus*,” blessed. We heard it in the Psalm so clearly. The lowly are blessed.

But at times they thought of “blessed” as being prosperous, as being powerful, as being one who has succeeded and has much external wealth. And in the Roman Empire, the context for Jesus even speaking the *Beatitudes* that we have heard, they had a patronage system. If you were going to be someone, you had to rely upon another for your worth. But it was not the worth that we know of in Christ or in God in our creation. It was a worth that if you had a patron, you might be able to step up a rung. Or they could bat you down and replace you very easily. It was all based in power and prestige and position. They would have called that *beatus, makarios*: blessed in the external.

But brothers and sisters, the *Beatitudes* we’ve heard, where it says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the peacemakers,” are not about present or material gifts. No. Take a look at them. They are all about the future. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.” And we know that the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven is not here yet. It is not complete. It’s beginning in us, but it’s not complete. And all of the other verbs throughout them are in the future tense. “For theirs will be...” or “They will be.”

So to be blessed here is not to be blessed because you’re “less than.” These *Beatitudes* are addressed to the disciples on the mountain. And so addressed to them, they are blessed in this sense: They are full of joy because as they live out their discipleship, they will follow the Lord, who himself was poor in spirit – relying upon the Father - who mourned, who was merciful, who sought to do justice and bring about peace, who sought to do God’s will (that is “righteousness,” God’s plan).

Now we all have hard times. Yes? We have situations that assault us, that make it very difficult from time-to-time. We lose a spouse. We’re diagnosed with a disease. We stub our toe and lose a toenail. It can be really simple, but sure can be painful.

But God does not guarantee that we will be without challenge or trial. What he provides for us is an inner strength. That is the “blessedness.” And it’s a blessedness that is rooted and incarnate in joy. So that when those moments come along, we know that we are still blessed. We know that when we face a disease, we’re still blessed. Because God is with us. When there is something that just doesn’t work in our lives – perhaps we lose our job -- yet in the midst of the pain, we are still blessed because we know in those moments the Lord has promised to remain with us, deep within.

So my brothers and sisters, I would encourage all of us to think about humility this week. Are we humble? Do we rely upon God? Do we know that our worth comes from God? And our worthiness comes from Jesus Christ. And what does that mean in how we live?

And we know throughout our readings today that we are blessed. But is that an interior blessing, or external?

Good things to ponder this week as we continue in our journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven.