



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Father Michael Brunner  
February 14, 2010  
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I                    Jer 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                    Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

(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.  
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.

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.

Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.



Reading II     1 Cor 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 first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Gospel            Lk 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.



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Woe to you when all speak well of you,  
for their ancestors treated the false  
prophets in this way.”

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Happy Saint Valentine's Day.

Perhaps that sounds strange to you. In our culture, and in the greeting card business, and in the retail businesses that reap the benefits of this over the top American invention, the Saint himself has been forgotten. The courageous martyr, of whom we know almost nothing, except that he gave his life for Christ and was buried on February 14 in Rome, is left out of the greeting cards and celebrations, which is probably just as well.

This retail holiday happens just as we prepare for Lent, and the contrast is striking. It demonstrates that what people value most may not have anything to do with God and God's ways. Jeremiah states it quite clearly in the first reading ,

*Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh,*

Another day this week points out the same contrast. Mardi Gras, the day before the beginning of Lent.

I guess that makes today not only Saint Valentine's Day but also Dimanche Gras ...Fat Sunday.

The Mardi Gras tradition is not American, though, but is enshrined in all Christian European Cultures and in the Caribbean, Brazil and Latin America as Carnival, Junkanoo, Fasching and so on. It is now a tradition that honors vice and overindulgence. Mardi Gras turns Jesus' word on its head by operating on the principle...

*The flesh is willing but the spirit is weak.*

As for Jeremiah, it's not surprising that most people ignore him and his words. He had that effect on people even while he lived and prophesied. He said things people didn't and still don't want to hear. In fact, he tried to quit the prophet business in disgust, but God's word burned too hotly in his soul.

It's not that Jeremiah never said pleasant things. He goes on in today's reading:

*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.*

That's a beautiful message and image, but it's just that most of Jeremiah's words stung and burned those who did not trust in God, but in human skill, power and pleasure.

In my comparative religion class the other day, the boys asked me why all the world's religions & mystical traditions have so many concerns and teachings about death. If I recall correctly, I asked a question like that somewhere back in my early teens, which only earned an incredulous look from my mother. It's a question only youth can ask



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sincerely. That question...and the answer...struck me yesterday as I looked at the date at the top of the page...February 13, 2010.

2010. How did time get here so fast? It seems like just a few days ago I could keep track of my age by the year. If it was 1957. I was 7 years old. As a wonderful hymn tells it, time like an ever rolling stream bears all its sons ...and daughters...away. All we can know for sure that is in our future is...death; and that is more than concern-giving. In the Hindu tradition, even the supreme god Shiva frequents cremation grounds, and both wears and sits on a bed of penitential ashes.

So it's no surprise we put ashes on our head this week. If, as Jeremiah says, you seek strength in the flesh, you must know that all flesh returns to dust and ashes.

Now you may be saying to yourself...what a cheerful homily for a Sunday morning. Well the Good news is that death and ashes, as inevitable as they are, are not the end.

Saint Paul, who was bit more cheerful and much more successful in his preaching than Jeremiah was, tells us what you and I already know (or we wouldn't be here.) Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is useless; If we have hoped in Christ only for this life, we are the most pitiable of all people.

In the Gospel today Christ himself speaks to us who live in a world destined to be reduced to ashes. He shows us a way through this world beyond the horizon we can see. Today Jesus preaches the beatitudes, as Saint Luke heard them, and they are different from the way you and I usually hear them; they have a different accent than those in Saint Matthews Gospel.

Jesus preaches his sermon not from a Mountain like in St. Matthew. In Luke's Gospel Jesus goes to the mountain before he teaches, to pray and commune with His Father. But when he teaches, Jesus speaks on level ground; He looks us in the eye. He is one of us speaking to us from human knowledge and experience. Luke's beatitudes are different from Matthews in another way; they are accompanied by the woes, contrapositives of the beatitudes.

If Matthews beatitudes are largely spiritual, Luke's are earthy and immediate. Luke is suggesting that Jesus and the Reign of God He has come to inaugurate are right here among us, right now. The fact that both versions are in the canon of scripture means they are both valid. What Matthew says and what Luke says....Jesus meant it all.

We should take comfort in that but also...It should make us uncomfortable, and so should Jesus' words, especially in St Luke's version we hear today. There Jesus sounds a bit like Jeremiah.



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Jesus states quite clearly what it is that yields happiness and true life—and what does not. In the reign of God, Jesus says, the world will be turned on its head.

If we are rich, have everything we need and more, look out.

If we have more than enough to eat, full cupboards and freezers...if we throw away in a week enough food to feed a hungry man for a week, look out.

If we are happy now, because we have our health and love and our family and friends around us, because we have a beautiful home and our portfolio didn't take too much of a hit, look out.

If everybody respects us and looks up to us, and thinks we are someone or something great...and especially if we think that about ourselves...look out.

It's only because they or we don't know our hidden faults, sins, thoughts and motives.

Look out not because those things we have are bad or that we got them by evil means, or anything like that.

Look out because it won't be that way in God's completed kingdom. We would feel pinched there, maybe even deprived, because we would only have enough when we are used to far too much.

God prevents that by fixing us up in Purgatory, but we can get a head start in Lent.

Those who are poor now, who have not a nickle saved,  
who are hungry now, who are unloved and unappreciated,  
who are empty physically and spiritually,  
who are ridiculed for what they believe and how they worship,  
those who feel the pinch now, they have an advantage.

They will more easily fit through the gate to God's kingdom's and will have far less trimming down to do.

I don't know about you, but I find it hard to hear that, and uncomfortable to think about when I know that most people in this world, most people Jesus died for, have lived and now live more like the people in Haiti than live like me. Most people in this world live their whole life in woe, while the only woe I have is that Fr Abbot has reduced the amount of salt and fat in the more than sufficient food at my disposal.

When we live as I live, it is too easy to depend on myself than to depend on God. When we live as I live, it is too easy to lord it over the poor and needy and weak, and too easy to make myself the judge of who is worthy of my charity. That is our woe and unfortunately it is what we are taught and conditioned to do in our society, to be self reliant, rugged individuals. God tends to be our last resort...God help me, God have mercy on me...when my car, my portfolio, or my health heads off a cliff.

You and I have a choice. We can choose to live now as if our life depended on God, even though we know we can make it for a while without him.



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Let's not get distracted by Valentines Day; lets not lose ourselves on Mardis Gras; Lets not view Lent as a temporary setback or painful consequence of our religion, like having to listen to this homily because we showed up for mass. Let's choose Christ and participate in his kingdom instead of building up our own.

Our whole life should be a Lent, a joyful springtime and realization that we live a new life as new creatures in Jesus Christ. And that means that everyday is not only Lent but also Easter. In Jesus Christ we have all the blessings, all the beatitude we need to get through the woes of this life and avoid any woes of the next. In Jesus Christ we have all we need to conquer death.

Mardis Gras is a time deliberately contrived to forget. You and I just need to remember. Lent is a time to remember who we really are, whom we are called to be; a time to remember what true love is all about, and to freely share in charity what we have. Lent is a time to remember and act on the fact that we are truly blessed.

Jesus reassures us with one more beatitude further on in Luke's Gospel...

*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*