

6th Sunday C. 07

1. Did you get the image of the first reading and the psalm, the twofold image of the just and the unjust person? It is one which we can remember easily, although it is probably more meaningful for those who live in warmer climates. It is the image of a tree or bush which has or does not have water. The just person is the person who trusts in the Lord and he or she is like a bush or tree planted near running water or stream. Even during the hot months its leaves remain green and healthy and it bears fruit. The unjust person, that is, the person who relies solely on himself or herself, on the other hand, is like a tree or bush planted in the desert. If it even survives, it still is barren. It produces nothing. And so, when we pray with the psalmist, “Lord, give my roots rain,” we are relying on the Lord, we are trusting in him and therefore are just, and we can know and believe that God will do exactly that. He will give our roots rain. He will, in ordinary language, give us faith and hope and love so that we can go, no matter what our difficulties may be.

2. Our second reading for today from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians insists upon the reality of the resurrection. If Paul is insisting on this, then it is clear that some members of the

community in Corinth must have been denying it. No, says Paul, this is not the Gospel. And if what you say were true, that there is no resurrection from the dead, then you would be the most pitiable of people. For then your faith would be in vain and you would still be in your sins, and all those who have already died would have utterly perished. But that is not the case. Christ is risen and his resurrection is a promise of our own future resurrection, for he is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

3. Our Gospel today is taken from the sixth chapter of Luke's Gospel and is very similar to the famous sermon on the mount found in ch. 5 of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew's sermon has nine beatitudes (Blessed are...); Luke's account has only 4, but it adds four woes to these blessings which are the reversals of his four blessings. Matthew's account does not have these woes. Luke speaks of the poor, the hungry, the sorrowing and the hated as blessed. Then he turns these around and gives their opposite. Woe to the rich, the filled, the joyful and the esteemed.

4. This sermon, in both its Matthean and Lucan form, is addressed to Jesus' disciples. Therefore, it is addressed to us because we claim to be disciples of the Lord. We have to ask ourselves: Are we poor, are we hungry, are we weeping, are we hated and

excluded and reviled? Or are we rich and full and laughing and well spoken of by all? If we are the former, we are blessed; if we are the latter, we are those to whom the Lord speak the word woe. I think most of us have to admit that we belong to the woe class—at least part of the time. Maybe some of us can claim to be poor, but we are not desperately poor. We don't go hungry, I hope. Most of us, please God, are not always mourning, and most of us are not ill spoken of. In short, we end up in the wrong group. We are rich, full, happy and well thought of. And yet Jesus brands us woeful. Does he really want us to be poor, hungry, sorrowing and despised? If so, then we can understand why he has so few real followers.

5. One way out of this dilemma would be to pay attention to the time sequence here. Jesus is speaking to his followers in their present condition. They are poor, hungry, troubled and unpopular, but he promises them that if they follow him, one day they will not be such. Later on, after they experienced him as risen, they would understand his teaching as applying to them in the resurrected life. There the disciples of Jesus will be rich, full, happy and accepted. And if we apply this teaching to today, I believe we can still say to today's poor, hungry, unhappy and despised that in the life after

death they will not be such but will be just the opposite: they will be rich, full, happy and accepted.

6. Saints are people who take this gospel almost literally and therefore decide that if they are to be rich, full and happy and accepted in the next life, they ought to be among the poor, literally poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and the despised in this life. Or if they cannot do that, then they at least associate with and help those who are such. Our pantry is one such effort by us here and now.

7. If we find this too much to do or bear, then we must at least accept this much: that we should not make wealth our aim but instead see it as a means, a means for doing good for others. If we don't want to be hungry, then we can at least try to use food well and to give food to others who don't have any. If we don't want to be sorrowing ourselves, we can at least be with those who are in mourning, and we can be suspicious of being well spoken of by others and not live our lives by other people's opinions but rather by our own convictions.

8. Maybe we can reduce all this to the image of the first reading and psalm. We put our trust in the Lord and not in our self and our own powers, even though we make use of these. Then we are poor,

because we live out of God and not out of our own strength. And then we seek for him to fill us and make us happy. And then we are concerned about what God thinks about us and not what the neighbors say.