

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle "C"

There was this wealthy investment banker from Philadelphia and he was visiting Louisiana. He came across this old Cajun just relaxing in the afternoon sun with a cold beer. He approached the Cajun and asked him what kind of work he did. The Cajun explained that he was a fisherman and that he had made his catch for the day, sold it and was relaxing. The rich guy began to teach the Cajun about economics. He said, don't you know that if you would work a little longer you could increase your catch and make more money? The Cajun said, yes, but what would I do with it. The rich guy said, well you could buy a bigger boat and then you could catch more fish with the same effort. The old Cajun then asked, what would I do with more fish? The guy said, well sell it of course and you can buy more boats and have an entire fleet. You could start a big company and make big bucks. Then you can sell the company and retire. The Cajun then said what would I do then? The rich guy said, well you can relax and enjoy life. To that the Cajun said, well what do you think I am doing now?

I used to think that the best way to live life was to not expect much. Kind of like the fisherman in the story. In the context of my life, I used to think that it was better to set small goals so that I could avoid disappointment. You know, like, don't try to hit a home run because if you get a single you will be disappointed. On the other hand, if you try to hit a single and wind up hitting a home run, you are elated. Yet this sort of goes contrary to my story. When I was in 6th grade, the Mother's Club held a debate and after that people would always tell me that I was going to be a lawyer. I didn't even know what a lawyer was. I never knew one. But, somehow that goal was placed in my brain

and nearly 20 yrs later I became a lawyer. This seems to contradict my earlier philosophy of not setting big goals, but it really doesn't and it really is what today's readings are all about. You see, St. Paul tells us that resurrection is the true goal of our lives. As the saying goes, Life on earth is not heaven, it is only the path to heaven. So, the question is do we focus on the long term and true goal, heaven or do we look at smaller goals.

I think that Jesus in the Gospel is giving us the answer. The Blessed are those on the road to heaven and he tells us how to be blessed .He says to be poor, hungry, to have people hate you and generally to have a bad day and you will be blessed. But there is so much more and it is how we look at life. Are we to look at the small disappointments are or we to look at the long term direction of our lives?

Life is a matter of perspective. Today's gospel compares being rich to being poor, hungry to being fed, weeping to laughing, having a good reputation to having a bad one. And on the face of it, Jesus appears to be telling us to be poor. But just what is poor? It just might depend on your perspective. The fisherman in the story might have technically been poor, but was he?

My son, Brian was discerning the priesthood up at Notre Dame, to be a member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. Being in an order is different from being a diocesan priest in that when you join an order you take an additional vow and that vow is poverty. One of the guys in formation with Brian told me that when you are in an order, that you are RICH! As you can imagine, I was taken back by that, but he insisted. He went on to explain that the order was wealthy and that everyone in the order shares that wealth. Well, sort of. He explained that the priests in the order want for nothing. They have no bills, they are well cared for and well, they are rich. But they don't own

anything. You see, being rich doesn't necessarily mean having a lot. It's kind of like rich equals poor in spirit.

Many see today's Catholics as Cafeteria Catholics. We accept the teachings of the Church that we like, but we ignore or actually rebut the ones we don't like. So, many will just ignore this gospel about the evils of being rich and move on. But we can't do that. The people who do this are not looking beyond the story and looking for the teaching or the message. You see, the story of the teaching of the Beatitudes is found in both the gospel of Matthew and today's version from Luke. But, the versions are different. Why? Well, one reason is that they were written for different audiences and thus the focus would be different. To really understand the teaching of Jesus, we have to consider the time and place and also the audience. St. Luke tells us that the audience was a diverse audience. There had to be some poor folks in that crowd, and some sad folks and also some hungry folks. Jesus was telling them that it was going to be ok. In fact, he told them that the kingdom will be theirs if they just followed him. Jesus is telling them to hold on it will be ok. He is telling them to rely on Him.

I think that the true message of the gospel today is one of dependence. I hate it when someone is referred to as a self made man or a self made woman. There is no such thing. The talents that we all use to achieve are God Given and it is in depending on the gifts of God that we become rich. If we become deluded into thinking that we do not need God, then woe to us. I believe that the message here is that dependence on Jesus is essential in all areas. We should come to depend on Jesus for our wealth, our happiness our joy. We should also know that when we see those in need, that Jesus provides for them also. And how does He do that? He does it through us. We are called to see that

Jesus came to bring salvation to the entire world, not just the Jews, or not just the haves, or not just anyone, be EVERYONE.

When I first started to pray about this gospel, I was having a hard time because we really do live in a rich society. I was trying to figure out how I was going to tell everyone that all of us are in woeful trouble. But then I realized, look beyond the story at the message. This is a good day to preach or teach about the fact that the Scriptures were written well after Jesus died and in fact after most of the apostles had died. They were written to retell the stories of Jesus to teach the message and to teach it to certain audiences. While the Gospel of Matthew was written for the Jewish people, Luke, the writer of today's Gospel was writing for a much broader audience including the Gentiles. That is why the stories cannot be taken literally as history. We have to understand the purpose of the story and the message. As I was writing this, I had to chuckle. I was wondering how all of those mega churches that preach taking the Bible literally could make their prosperity message stand in light of today's gospel. You see, to understand scripture we really do need to look for the message. In the first reading, the tree that was along the shoreline totally dependent on the water from the stream was the one that prospered. Likewise, we that are totally dependent on God will prosper. But it doesn't stop there.

A Jesuit priest who had served in the U.S. Congress died, and in a eulogy for him he was quoted as saying 'Imagine what the world would think of the United States if the health and welfare of children everywhere became the top objective of America's foreign policy! It could happen – and it could happen soon – if enough people cared.' While I would be quick to agree with Fr. Drenin, I must add, that it is hard to assist the poor from

an empty plate. With that, I would like to suggest that riches are provided us by our Lord to serve the world. The WORLD means something different to different people.

I heard a story this weekend about a couple that had a gutted out motor home in the back of their property. A worker from a company that was doing work on the property behind theirs needed a place to stay and the couple let him stay in this gutted out piece of nothing. The man was grateful. Before it was over, four families in the neighborhood were feeding him, and he stayed there five months. This couple used their wealth, provided by God to help this homeless person. This couple by many standards is rich. I now understand the saying of Jesus, to whom much is given much will be added. Remember the talents. The one that invested the most and earned the most received the greatest reward. You see, it is not so much how much we have, but what we do with it. If we realize that all we have is a gift from God, then we know that we have to use what we have to accomplish God's plan. If we do that, I truly believe that the Kingdom of God will be at hand.