

Sixth Week Ordinary Time

Jermiah 17:5-8 1 Corinthinans 15:12, 16-20

“Coming down from the mountain”.

Jesus returns from his prayer vigil. This “God” place had been the site of his selection of the twelve from among the disciples.

The great teaching is located on the plain and marks a new stage in the formation of the disciples.

The crowd is present but Jesus directs his words to the disciples. “Those listening” are potentially all future disciples. The story has parallels with the giving of the Law by Moses. The teaching is structured by Luke into four blessings and four woes.

Te first blessing, directed at the disciples, is “blessed are the poor; the reign of God is yours. This blessing finds its antithesis in the first of the woes, a kind of expletive used by the ancient prophets as a sign of particular disfavour.

The rich and the poor designate classes of society. The rich can depend on their own resources, power, property and money, for their security, the poor can depend on nothing except the graciousness of God. Luke also uses the words rich and poor, to differentiate between those who accept the prophet and those who reject the prophet. Jesus leaves the hearer to decide where they will stand.

The next pair, blessing and woe, present a reversal; the hungry will have enough the satisfied shall go hungry. The phrase, the hungry, recalls the Magnificat, “the hungry will be filled with good things.” We also catch a glimpse ahead to the feeding of the crowds.

Those who weep are those who feel concern for the damage caused by the selfish, those focussed on their own wellbeing. The mockers and the scornful are those who feel superior to the needs of those less fortunate.

The final blessing and woe refer to the ministry of the prophet. The work of the prophet cannot be judged on how well the message is received. The ancient scriptures have plenty of examples of those who would preach and what the crowd wanted to hear rather than the word of God.

Luke sets out the conditions for the following of Jesus. God is clearly at work in this new prophet, bringing about transformation by reversing commonly held values of selfishness and self-promotion. The boundaries for disciples are wide and inclusive. The spirit of God is present in those who act to promote the vision of God.

Jeremiah uses imagery from nature to make the same points. There are two trees, decide which tree you are: a barren tree in an eroded, sterile wasteland unchanged by the passing seasons or an evergreen planted near a stream from which it draws life, fruitful even in drought.

At the beginning of a new year, these readings call us to look at the quality of adult education in our parishes and our diocese. We cannot remain faithful to our call to discipleship unless we are constantly forming ourselves on the pattern of Jesus.

What encourages us to persevere is the concept of resurrection. Without belief in resurrection, Paul says, our preaching has no content. In Christ our hopes are not to be limited to this life only, but this is much more than the old literal vision of an eternity of personal fulfillment.

Our hopes are God's hopes of daily, yearly recreation, restoration and the gathering in of the scattered. Resurrection is a sign of continuity, which sees all life as eternal present-time, which is to say that the past and the future constitute a *divine present*. Our individual contributions, however small and seemingly insignificant, matter.