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Blessings that Cure Human Woes

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Blessings that Cure Human Woes

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Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for February 14, 2010 for Cycle C:

Jer 17:5-8, Ps 1, 1 Cor 15, a2, 16-20, Lk 6:17, 20-26

BLESSINGS THAT CURE HUMAN WOES

Lawrence E. Frizzell

People turn to the Scriptures for solace and consolation and we are familiar with beautiful texts giving comfort to the mourners and the afflicted. Perhaps some are going to be shocked on Sunday when they hear the opening sentence of the passage from Jeremiah the prophet, who taught in Jerusalem from 627 B.C. until after the city was destroyed in 587. "Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh (human nature), whose heart turns away from the LORD"(17:5).

Jeremiah did not pronounce a condemnation of all human relationships, which must be founded on trust. Rather, in strong terms he drew attention to the fundamental need in all situations: a single-hearted devotion to God. The person who ignores God and thinks that all can be accomplished through human effort and alliances will miss the essential perspective to all creative activity: whatever is valuable eternally must be grounded in charity.

Without judging the eternal destiny of entrepreneurs whose life is ruined as their "empire" crumbles, one cannot but think of this misplaced energy and talent as a waste of gifts divinely bestowed for the purpose of building a world oriented toward the service of the Lord.

The link between Jeremiah's poem and Psalm 1 was noted long ago, so this gem is our response to the first reading. The Psalmist answers our query: "How does one keep the human heart steadfast in fidelity to God?" The truly blessed or happy person not only avoids bad company; the individual "delights in the Torah (Law) of the LORD and meditates on his Torah day and night" (Ps 1:2). It was from such intimacy with the heavenly Father's will that Jesus gained the profound insights that his teachings convey.

Like the prophets and psalmists, Jesus proclaimed that God would bring a reversal to human standards for evaluating happiness and success in life. The poor should indeed strive by all honest means to better their lot, so that they will sense their innate dignity. However, rather than envy the rich, they should allow God to fill the vacuum of their lives with the divine presence. This perspective of faith will make them appreciate their intimacy with the King and share in his reign.

The last of St. Luke's beatitudes presents the paradox that Jesus' message will provoke a strong negative reaction and persecution may well come upon those who live and teach his message. The pattern was known from ancient times. "Thus it was that your fathers treated the prophets" (Lk 6:23). Certainly Jeremiah was both ostracized and persecuted for his proclamation of God's Word; later tradition claimed that he was stoned to death by the rebels who dragged him off to Egypt.

Quite naturally we hope to get along with our neighbor, and not only do we want to be at peace -- we'd like to be popular! On tour during their heyday, the Beatles exulted: "We're more popular than Jesus!" People who knew the Gospel were slightly amused because the Lord never sought cheap acclaim or the "rewards" it brings. Rather, he faithfully pursued the path of fidelity to his Father's will, no matter what the cost. If we wish to share in his promise of the kingdom, we must reflect on the ways in which the Gospel contradicts aspects of our culture and then ask for the strength to be witnesses to that teaching.