

Homily for the 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C
St Peter's 9:30,11:30, 5:00 Masses - Feb 17, 2019

Jeremiah 17: 5-8

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Luke 6:17, 20-26

A Blessing or a Curse - What Will It Be?

Introduction

In Lourdes, France, in 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to 14 year old Bernadette Soubirous. Many miracles and fruits have demonstrated the truth of this occurrence. If you go there, you will experience a very deep sense of God's presence. But, you will also have to ignore the curse of all the incredibly crass commercial activity. Little plastic Mary's fly off the shelves by the thousands at all the little booths.

There is a daily late evening procession of sick pilgrims praying the rosary. At the head is carried a platform with a large statue of Mary. She is outlined by white lights and, like a Christmas display, they blink on and off. Blink, blink, blink. It was silly but it made me look at her and drew me to her Son.

Like a blinking light, Mary, from Lourdes, the readings today make us look: blessings- blink, curses- blink, blessings and curses: blink, blink, blink.

Jeremiah

The curse comes before the blessing in the passage from the prophet Jeremiah: "Cursed is the one who trusts in mere mortals."

That first line looks like you should never trust people, perhaps recommending a kind of paranoia. But the second line clears up the meaning: "and makes mere flesh their strength."

That means to look to human sources of strength, leaving God out. Right away, that might suggest a question to us: From where comes my strength? I admit that in between listening to Catholic talks, I listen to the podcasts of some motivational speakers. Just as one example, one of the best known for decades has been Tony Robbins. His book title is *Awaken the Giant Within: How To Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical and Financial Destiny*. It shows you how to become the master of your own life.

But the only destiny which really matters is left out of the book title. There is only one destiny which really matters. That's the one for which God made us. But the curse is for the one who turns away from God and to trust only in human strength. Which means basically that we trust only in ourselves.

"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord." This is the point. Trust here has to mean a deep abiding foundational confidence. Being blessed does not mean that there is no trial. You still have to deal with the heat when it comes. You just don't have to fear.

"in the year of drought the tree planted by a stream is not anxious."

Everyone is trying to figure out how to be more resilient in dealing with the ordinary challenges of life, especially our young people, who are showing the strain in so many ways. Yet, a common parenting strategy is to say "I won't force religion on my son or daughter. I will wait for them to grow up and decide on their own. And so, they are often deprived of the blessing that provides strength in difficulty. That's a curse. Dale Carnegie's *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* isn't enough.

Psalm

In the psalm, it's the Blessed and the wicked. But, of course, it is the wicked who are cursed. Blessed is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked ... but whose delight is in the law of the Lord. You can trust God's law to keep you on a holy path.

Corinthians

Corinth was a worldly seaport with international influence. You could get anything you wanted. You could do anything you wanted. There was great wealth and great poverty. There was a mentality that anything goes. The Corinthians were skeptical about the resurrection. People fell back into pleasure seeking.

Paul had to remind them of his message: Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. If you don't believe that, "then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." This is always at the core of the crisis of faith. Will we believe God or listen to what we hear around us?

Luke

Jesus speaks from mountains, from boats, from a stormy sea, from the temple, in the country and in the city, and today from a plain.

The sermon on the mount and the sermon on the plain both begin with beatitudes. Jesus envisions the conditions of this life being overturned in the next. What looks like a curse in this life is a blessing or beatitude in the next. What looks like you are blessed becomes a curse.

Even the materially poor can be so attached to what they do have that... and the rich can tend to trust in their wealth, living in poverty of spirit. Jesus warns that disaster awaits the comfortable of the world whose prosperity and notoriety have turned them away from God and the demands of his covenant.

Integration

Blessings and curses, that's language that doesn't apply in an enlightened age, surely. That's language used to scare people who are gullible or naive. You bet it applies to us. Turn to God and, no matter what happens, you are secure in the knowledge of God's presence with you. Does it seem like God has abandoned you or is not present or does not care? I used to know someone who, whenever she was having a bad day, would say that God

was smiting her, striking her down. She had nowhere else to go to blame for the sadness.

But what happens when our hearts are broken because we have lost someone we love or our own health. Where do we turn when our spirits feel broken, when we are bowed down with the weight and the trials of life. Hear God say to you, I have not left you alone. Turn to me. I will be your strength. I will be a father to you. I will be your God and you will be my people. I am with you always, Jesus says. I will lay down my life for you.

One motivational speaker I had to stop listening to when he started to say we should stop apologizing for our desire to acquire wealth. He said, look even the Bible says "Ask and you shall receive. I couldn't believe he would take that beautiful passage about turning to Jesus who gave himself for me and put flashing lights around it and say, "look even God wants you to be rich."

But it's not really about being rich. It's about attitude. Jesus warns that, even when we don't have a lot, we can be tempted to trust in our possessions or our status. Success in this life can be selfishness and a false sense of security.

You and I still have to figure out how to be blessed and not cursed. Today we heard from Psalm #1. That psalm says that if your delight is in the Lord, you will be blessed. Paragraph #1 from the Catechism says that God is the one who is infinitely blessed. You can't get any more blessed than infinite.

Why would God give us our lives if he already has everything in spades. Would it be so he can take pleasure in cursing us, or smiting us as my friend said? That first paragraph goes on: He freely created us to share in His own Blessed life. For this reason, he calls us to seek him, to know him, to love him with all our strength. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his son as redeemer and saviour. In his son and through him he invites us to become heirs of his blessed life.

Curses and Blessings

Shortly we will witness the bringing up to that altar our little gift of bread and wine. It looks like we are just getting people involved in helping the priest do what he has got to do. But that little bit of bread and wine represents ourselves, all of us. It represents the best we have to offer. I guess we could bring up an I Phone 10 and hope that Fr. could ask the Holy Spirit to turn it into an I Phone 12.

But, when we look up from the congregation to the altar, we see the place where we witness the re-presentation of our Lord's sacrifice of himself for the entire human race.

We make the sign of the cross on our bodies, but when you look up from where you are that altar you see THE SIGN of the Cross. A thousand years before anyone knew about crucifixion, that Roman instrument of torture and execution, the book of Deuteronomy warns that "Anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse." Jesus didn't just heal and teach. He let himself be so far from the blessedness of God, which he had a right to, he let himself be fully cursed.

Motivational Message

One motivational speaker I listened to says that you can use your failures to make you great. It's not how many times you fall down but how many times you get back up again. People shouted a message like that at Jesus on the cross. "You saved others. Save yourself. Use your power. Come down from that cross."

But Jesus was crushed by the weight of what he had to endure, not just the physical and psychological suffering but the entire weight of human sinfulness. He asked the father to take away this cup - take away this curse, but then he took it on.

Central to our faith, Paul tells the Corinthians, is that the cursed Jesus was raised to new life. Was he resurrected because he because he kept repeating to himself. You can do it? You can get through this. Just believe in

yourself. No, no, no. He was raised to life out of no life at all, not even a spark or an ember, just like at creation when something came from nothing.

At the resurrection, life came from NO life. Out of the absolute finality of death came death's conqueror. That's our motivational message. That's the message around which we can place the blinking lights to remind us, to speak to us, to convince us. If we trust in God above all else, no curse will hold us, only the Blessed life planned for us from the beginning.