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In our gospel reading for today (Lk 6:17,20-26) we hear Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. Jesus is contrasting blessings and woes. Jesus is teaching his disciples how to live "the new life," the Way of Grace versus the way of spiritual death.

Blessings and woes, like life and death, are inherent contradictions. As Irene Nowell, OSB puts it, "The four blessings portray life; the four woes signify death. (The word woe in early use was a funeral lament.)" As Christian disciples, we need to recognize our contradictions in life. We need to name them, claim them, and change them by His Grace. Jesus identifies the people with woes as those who find their satisfaction in worldly riches, who are full of themselves with bodily satisfaction (pride and sensuality), who are popular among the worldly with laughter and who have others who speak well of them (vanity). To be blessed is to be poor in attachments to the things of this world, to hunger for spiritual fulfillment, to weep at the loss of God's presence in the world, and to be hated by those who hate the Son of Man.

This life of blessedness is attainable for those who trust in Jesus Christ and are attached to Him through His Church. When we are attached to Christ, we share in the power of His Resurrection. We then live the "new life" in Christ and triumph over the ways of spiritual death. As the prophet Jeremiah puts it in the first reading (Jer 17:5-8), "Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit."



"Except for the people, the hours, the work, the stress, and the pay, this is the best job I ever had!"

Rich In Poverty: Scott Hahn Reflects on the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time



Jeremiah 17:5–8

Psalms 1:1–4, 6

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16–20

Luke 6:17, 20–26

The blessings and woes we hear in today's Gospel mark the perfection of all the wisdom of the Old Testament.

That wisdom is summed up with marvelous symmetry in today's First Reading and Psalm: Each declares that the righteous—those who hope in the Lord and delight in His Law—will prosper like a tree planted near living waters. The wicked, who put their "trust in human beings," are cursed to wither and die.

Jesus is saying the same thing in the Gospel. The rich and poor are, for Him, more than members of literal economic classes. Their material state symbolizes their spiritual state.

The rich are "the insolent" of today's Psalm, boasting of their self-sufficiency, the strength of their flesh, as Jeremiah says in the First Reading. The poor are the humble, who put all their hope and trust in the Lord.

We've already seen today's dramatic imagery of reversal in Mary's Magnificat. There, too, the rich are cast down while the hungry are filled and the lowly exalted (see Luke 1:45–55, also 16:19–31).

That's the upside-down world of the Gospel: in poverty, we gain spiritual treasure unimaginable; in suffering and even dying "on account of the Son of Man," we find everlasting life.

The promises of the Old Testament were promises of power and prosperity—in the here and now. The promise of the New Covenant is joy and true freedom even amid the misery and toil of this life.

But not only that. As Paul says in today's Epistle, we're to be pitied if our hope is "for this life only."

The blessings of God mean that we'll laugh with the thanksgiving of captives released from exile (see Psalm 126:1–2), feast at the heavenly table of the Lord (see Psalm 107:3–9), "leap for joy" as John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb (see Luke 6:23; 1:41, 44), and rise with Christ, "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."