

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #78

READING I Jeremiah 17:5–8

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah

Thus says the Lord:

**Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings,
who seeks his strength in flesh,
whose heart turns away from the Lord.**

**He is like a barren bush in the desert
that enjoys no change of season,
but stands in a lava waste,
a salt and empty earth.**

**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.**

Remember that this is a study in contrasts. Stress those words that convey desolation and emptiness, and don't hold back on the word "Cursed."

The images of "barren bush," "lava waste," and "salt and empty earth" are meant to be jarring. Your tone should convey both distress and warning.

Your tempo and tone on phrases like "stretches out its roots," "leaves stay green," and "shows no distress" contrast with what went before because now you are speaking with the enthusiasm of flowing, surging life that "still bears fruit."

READING I Adopting the language of the wise, Jeremiah sketches opposite postures in life: the senseless, who trust in the things of the passing world, and the wise, who trust in the Lord. True security is placing oneself in God's hands. The prophet finds his contemporaries, beginning with the king, behaving like senseless people, relying on the fragile, passing things rather than on the Word of the Lord as the source of life. The contrasting images are poignant: the

person who trusts in things of the passing world are "like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season." The description reminds one of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: a lava waste, "a salt and empty earth." On the other hand, the one who trusts in God "is like a tree planted beside the waters . . . it fears not the heat when it comes." Even in a year of drought, it bears fruit.

READING II Paul points to the center of our hope: the Resurrection of Christ, without which we are lost. We are the most pitiable of people if we place our trust in what has no saving value. Christ, by his Resurrection from the dead, is the first fruits of salvation. The rest of the harvest is to follow. But if we believe in Christ Jesus, whose Resurrection is the pledge of our hope, we are also healthy fruit for eternal life.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM · Psalm 1:1–2, 3, 4, 6 (40:5a)

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Blessed the man who follows not
the counsel of the wicked,
nor walks in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the company of the insolent,
but delights in the law of the LORD
and meditates on his law day and night.

Not so the wicked, not so;
they are like chaff which the wind drives
away.
For the LORD watches over the way of the
just,
but the way of the wicked vanishes.

He is like a tree
planted near running water,
that yields its fruit in due season,
and whose leaves never fade.
Whatever he does, prospers.

READING II · 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16–20

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

If **Christ** is preached as **raised from the dead**,
how can **some** among you say there is no Resurrection
of the dead?

If the dead are **not** raised, neither has **Christ** been raised,
and if **Christ** has not been raised, your faith is **vain**;
you are still in your **sins**.

Then those who have fallen **asleep** in Christ have **perished**.
If for **this life only** we have hoped in Christ,
we are the most **pitiable** people of **all**.

But now **Christ has** been raised from the dead,
the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen **asleep**.

Paul's is an urgent agenda. Don't let this sound unimportant.

"Vain" comes as a surprise after the triple use of "raised." Stress it, and then build in intensity to "you are still . . ."

Paul is arguing his case. Do the same. The third "if . . . then" clause requires the most intensity. Don't waste the word "pitiable."

There is a shift in tone here. This is the good news that contrasts with earlier arguments.

GOSPEL

Jesus, standing on a level stretch, is within earshot of many disciples, including foreigners. He addresses all who suffer misfortune—poverty, hunger, sorrow, and persecution. The Reign of God transforms human reality, but it also implies a change of status for those who reject it: Jesus does not curse them, but laments their lot in life. The punchline of Jesus' discourse of the Beatitudes and the "bad-attitudes," like the image from Jeremiah, is either happiness or grief, spoken of in terms of blessed or cursed. No one is excluded from God's

Reign, but the present world's standards are reversed: the formerly wretched, "you poor," become the privileged in God's Reign.

From his prayer on the mountain, Jesus descended and encountered the crowd. He "came down": his descent leads to the Beatitudes. The Incarnation of the Son of God is traced by his descent and entrance into communion with humanity, and finally by his descent to death, only to ascend in the Resurrection and Ascension. Jesus came down the mountain, and looking at his disciples he said, "Blessed are

you who are poor," and then "Woe to you who are rich." Thus, Jesus affirms the need for us to descend and assess our own poverty, so that we might claim the inestimable wealth of God's Reign.

The first word, "Blessed," sets the tone. Who does not want to receive this beatitude? Jesus names the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the mistreated—in a word, the miserable according to worldly standards—"blessed" and affirms that God's Reign belongs to them. His words clash with our instincts. He declares that, right there, in the place where misery