

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**.

Jeremiah = jayr-uh-Mi-uh

Jeremiah contrasts those who do not trust in the Lord with those who do. Give special attention to the introductory phrase, "Thus says the Lord." Speak it slowly, pause, and look up. Then, emphasize the word "Cursed."

Read slowly here, lingering over these vivid descriptions. Pause after "empty earth."

Emphasize "Blessed" and "Lord," using a grateful tone. The final emphasis in this reading comes as you proclaim the results, that the person will bear fruit even in drought.

READING I In what, or in whom, should we place our trust? This question has often been answered by an appeal to the *two ways*, exemplified in today's responsorial psalm (Psalm 1). Today's readings clearly argue for placing one's trust in God and God's way.

The poetic oracles of Jeremiah, the second of the three major prophets, are set against the backdrop of the threat and later assault against Jerusalem, its inhabitants, and its rulers. In the end, Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed in 587 BC and its

people and royal family taken into exile in Babylon.

Reflecting the wisdom tradition, Jeremiah's prophetic oracle describes two ways of life and their consequences. One way is the path of the cursed person, who places his trust in human beings. When we consider the historical context of this trust in mere flesh, Jeremiah points to Jerusalem's reliance on military strength and armaments, as well as economic and diplomatic experience. The fate of those who walk this path is barrenness and emptiness. While the bush may have the appearance of life, it

will ultimately perish because it lacks the required nourishment, roots, and water for survival. In contrast, the blessed one who trusts in the Lord follows the opposite path. Steering clear of reliance on doubtful and fickle human resources, the blessed one finds power and strength in the Lord and his covenant of justice. Thus, one's ultimate end—death or life—is determined by the object of one's trust. Sadly, Jerusalem, its people, and its leaders walked the path of the cursed and paid the price.

For meditation and context:

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

Avoid the temptation to make the word "if" your focus, because Paul's thought process is most visible in the negatives of his argument. Use a patient tone throughout.

Bold words here can help you organize the logic of this argument. Pause after each sentence, since each is its own small syllogism.

Paul has a robust conclusion. Notice that this sentence contains no "if."

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.

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.

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.

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**.

READING II

Continuing an instruction on the resurrection that he had started at the beginning of chapter 15 (see last week's second reading), today's brief instruction from Paul focuses on the consequences of denying Jesus' resurrection. In this way, Paul presents the community with two pathways: one to life and the other, quite literally, to death.

Beginning with the central tenet of apostolic preaching (Christ is raised from the dead), Paul rewords the Corinthian position in the form of a rhetorical question: "how can some among you say there

is no resurrection of the dead?" To dissuade them from their position, Paul presents seven if/then statements (1 Corinthians 15:12-19) broken into a deduction and two consequences. The deduction from the Corinthian denial of resurrection is that Christ has not been raised either (15:13). This deduction has two consequences.

First, Paul's preaching to them has been useless and irresponsible (15:14-15). Second, in considering the consequences for the Corinthians, Paul makes several assertions. Repeating the deduction that Christ was not raised, Paul declares that it

means that they have believed in vain ("your faith is vain"). Not only are they still in their sins, but those who have already died, as well as the living (including them), are destined for eternal death. Finally, emphasizing his and their reason for hope, Paul affirms the path to life, reminding them that indeed "Christ has been raised from the dead," and all who have fallen asleep in him will share his resurrected life.

GOSPEL

After choosing his disciples, Jesus finally embarks on his prophetic mission of preaching and

GOSPEL Luke 6:17, 20–26

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Jesus came down with the Twelve
and stood on a stretch of level ground
with a great crowd of his disciples
and a large number of the people
from all Judea and Jerusalem
and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon.
And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said:

“Blessed are you who are **poor**,
for the **kingdom of God is yours**.

Blessed are you who are now **hungry**,
for **you will be satisfied**.

Blessed are you who are now **weeping**,
for **you will laugh**.

Blessed are you when people **hate** you,
and when they **exclude** and **insult** you,
and **denounce** your name as **evil**
on account of the **Son of Man**.

Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!

Behold, your **reward** will be great in **heaven**.

For their **ancestors** treated the **prophets** in the **same way**.

But **woe** to you who are **rich**,
for **you have received your consolation**.

Woe to you who are **filled** now,
for **you will be hungry**.

Woe to you who **laugh** now,
for **you will grieve and weep**.

Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for their **ancestors** treated the **false prophets** in **this way**.”

The sermon here has an elegant parallel structure, with four blessings and four woes, balanced on a central command to rejoice. Shape your phrasing around the fact that Jesus' audience most likely included many people who were poor.

Highlight the word “Blessed” and each of its objects. The idea that the poor and hungry are blessed would be counterintuitive to those gathered around Jesus.

A bold tone here is important. The prophets were tasked with comforting the oppressed and, importantly, with calling oppressors to obey to God's law and to act responsibly toward their most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Again, highlight the countercultural but logical future promises to these groups.

teaching. The scene we have in today's Gospel is an impressive one, with his disciples, a large crowd, and eager hearers from a wide geographical area in attendance. Known as the Sermon on the Plain, this section of Luke shares some features with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and their joint comparison to Moses' delivery of the Torah at Mount Sinai. There are several striking contrasts, however, including a focus on the two ways. For example, whereas in Matthew Jesus preaches a sermon that consists of nine beatitudes, in Luke Jesus speaks of four beatitudes and four woes.

The mention of the woes recalls the tradition of the two ways and brings to mind the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy, as well as the woes uttered by the prophets.

Yet another difference is found in Jesus' direct manner of address, where in Luke Jesus addresses the crowd more personally (“you who are poor” / “the kingdom of God is yours”). This is coupled with the concrete nature of blessed and woeful conditions that will be reversed by the values of the kingdom, and it echoes the poetic oracle of Jeremiah in the first reading. The cursed are those who rely on human

resources (wealth, being full, laughing, and enjoying respect), but their fortune will be overturned in the kingdom. The blessed, in contrast, are those who place their trust in God in the present moment, confident that their present misfortune (poverty, hunger, weeping, and receiving contempt from others) will be overturned in the kingdom. No matter one's present circumstances, wisdom demands walking the path of trust in God. S.L.