

6th Sunday after the Epiphany

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.

The text for the Sermon is the Gospel we heard before, Luke 6:17-26.

17 Jesus went down with them and stood on a level place with a large crowd of His disciples and a great many people from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled by unclean spirits were made well. 19 All the people were trying to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all. 20 Jesus looked at His disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor! For yours is the kingdom of God.

21 "Blessed are you who are hungry now! For you will be satisfied.

"Blessed are you who are weeping now! For you will laugh.

22 "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, insult you, and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man! 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For, you see, your reward is great in heaven. For that is how their fathers used to treat the prophets.

24 "However, how terrible for you who are rich! For you have already received your comfort.

25 "How terrible for you who are well fed now! For you will be hungry.

"How terrible for you who are laughing now! For you will mourn and weep.

26 "How terrible for you when all people speak well of you! For that is how their fathers used to treat the false prophets.

Lord God heavenly Father, sanctify us in Your truth, Your Word is Truth Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

I'm sure that most of you have seen the many money lending commercials. Hop on the Money train and your financial worries will be over. Call Wallet Wizard and we can lend you up to \$5000 "that you don't have" deposited in your bank on the same day. And there is many more.

More and more people are trying to live life as a great financial success when, in fact, he is teetering on the edge of financial disaster. They are desperately trying to maintain their image. Even as they sit in front of the biggest TV that they can fit in the room they still want more. It's clear that they are living double lives - one in public and another quite different life in their finances. Their public appearance is quite different from their financial reality. They are leading a lives of financial deception.

While it's very serious to lead a deceptive life financially, it's even more serious to lead a deceptive life spiritually. Financial deception will get you into trouble in this life. Spiritual deception will get you into trouble forever. It's much better to lead a truthful life both financially and especially spiritually. Today's gospel tells us about a time that Jesus taught about these two paths of life, the honest way of blessing and the deceptive way of woe.

At first, it might seem that Jesus is teaching the moral virtues of financial poverty and the evils of financial wealth. The first beatitude in today's Gospel is, "**Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.**" The first woe is, "**However, how terrible for you who are rich! For you have already received your comfort**" This certainly sounds as though Jesus is promoting poverty as good and wealth as evil.

There's a problem with this interpretation. What do we do with all of God's wealthy friends? What do we do with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were all rich? What do we do with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who buried Jesus? In fact, what do we do with John who wrote one of the Gospels and his brother James? They could hire servants to help them in the fishing business. What about Matthew the tax collector who wrote another one of the Gospels? He was wealthy enough to give a party in Jesus' honour and invite all his friends. Now, Jesus Himself was poor enough to say, "**Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but**

the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." [Luke 9:58] Nevertheless, He had wealthy followers, and He never condemned them for that wealth.

What then does Jesus mean? For help with that, we can look to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. In that sermon, Jesus said, **"Blessed are those who are poor in spirit! For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** [Matthew 5:3] Jesus is not talking about being financially poor, but spiritually poor. He's not asking us to look at our earthly portfolios, but our heavenly portfolios.

As we look at these beatitudes in today's gospel, we see that the spiritually poor, hungry, mourning, and persecuted stand before God honestly. They know they are poor for they have no wealth or currency that has any value for salvation. They hunger for God's righteousness - the righteousness that Jesus Christ earned for us with His holy life and His suffering and death on the cross. They weep for their sins because they understand the curse that those sins have earned. The Holy Spirit has enlightened them so that they are spiritually honest.

Almighty God is pleased to provide what is lacking for those who are spiritually honest. They receive the Kingdom of God. That is, they receive Jesus Christ and all His gifts - especially the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation that Jesus earned with His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus Christ fills them with His righteousness as He takes away the emptiness of sin. The Holy Spirit gives Christ's righteousness as He works faith through Word and Sacrament. The spiritually honest have the ultimate satisfaction that comes through Word and Sacrament here on earth and forever at the Heavenly feast.

The world though, - doesn't understand the honest way. Ordinarily, the world loves the word free. It rejoices over free food, free clothes, free tickets, and so on. But, when it comes to free salvation, the greatest gift of all, the world becomes hateful. The world hates God. Therefore, the world hates all those who trust in God. Nevertheless, Jesus encourages His disciples to rejoice and leap for joy when the world persecutes them.

But Jesus isn't talking about the hassles that the world throws at all people every day. These troubles are the natural result of sin in the world. Instead, Jesus is talking about those troubles we have specifically because we trust in Him. Jesus is talking about the troubles we have simply because we are Christians. The Apostles are an example of this. In Acts, we read the account of the Apostles before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin punished them for preaching in the name of Jesus. [The Sanhedrin,] **called the apostles in, flogged them, ordered them not to speak using the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 The apostles went away from the council, rejoicing that they had been thought worthy of being dishonoured for the sake of the Name. [Act 5:40-41.]**

Those who trust in Jesus Christ will encounter slander, rejection, persecution, and, at times, may even encounter a violent death. Nevertheless, the eternal reward we receive through Jesus Christ lavishly compensates us well beyond the struggles of this life. When we receive persecution for Jesus sake, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to endure it and triumph over it. Spiritual honesty realizes that persecution for Jesus sake is a sign of the heavenly reward God gives us.

Jesus contrasted the honest way with the deceptive way of life. The sad thing about the deceptive way of life is that the deceivers deceive themselves. God serves us with blessings beyond our understanding in His Word and Sacraments. He offers us the forgiveness that Jesus earned for us with His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Nevertheless, the deceivers believe that they serve God. They believe they are rich in their own good works and rely on themselves for salvation. They believe that they are full of the righteousness that leads to salvation. They laugh at repentance as unnecessary. They rely on themselves for salvation instead of trusting in God who died for them on the cross.

The result of this deceptive way is truly sad. What they have on this earth is all that they will ever have. At the end of their time on this earth, they will stand before God and God will send them away empty. Those who relied on earthly wealth are eternally destitute. Those who were full of their own righteousness, are eternally empty. Those who laughed at sin, will weep eternally. They deceive themselves with earthly rewards only to find that the things of this world don't last. They don't learn the truth until it is too late. They don't learn the truth because they listen to false prophets. They listen because the false prophets tell them what they want to hear. As St. Paul told Timothy, **For a time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine. Instead, they will follow their own desires, and, because they have itching ears, they will**

surround themselves more and more with teachers. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. [2 Timothy 4:3,4.]

There are two ways. Only one leads to blessing. The other leads to woe and sorrow.

The way to blessing depends on Jesus Christ. He is the one who first became poor for us. He is the one who hungered through forty days of temptation for us. He is the one who wept over Jerusalem. He is the one who endured the hatred, the exclusion, the reviling, and the spurning of the cross. He is the one who paved the way of blessing through death into eternal life through His own death and resurrection. He is the one who offers us grace and every blessing.

The way to woe is the way of self-deception. Those who travel this path, deceive themselves. They believe that they are spiritually rich, spiritually full, and without sin. They follow the doctrines of the false prophets who deceive them with the myths they want to hear instead of the truth they need to hear. They are on the way of woe and don't know it. "Enter through the narrow gate! For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who are going in through it. [Matthew 7:13.] Don't be a worldly spiritual person and deceive yourself. **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your family."** Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayer of the Church 6th Sunday after the Epiphany 2019

P As the prophet reminds us, blessed are those who trust in the Lord. So do we come this day with the concerns of our hearts and our prayers on behalf of all as they have need.

Brief silence

Blessed Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have delivered Your people through the blood of Your Son and have given us the new birth into a hope and life death cannot overcome. Grant to Your Church honesty in our preaching and love in our service to those who have not yet heard the Gospel. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Blessed Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have given us Your pledge and promise that we shall not be alone. Guard Your people against the threats of the enemy and the persecution of a world still against You. Deliver all our pastors, here in the AELC, and abroad in the ULMA. Bless our teachers, and other church workers from all that would hinder their service to us on Your behalf, and bestow upon them Your Spirit and His gifts for their faithful work. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Blessed Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You hold in Your hand all the might of man and though we struggle against the enemies of Your will, You have promised to make all things work together for Your purpose. Bless our nation and those who lead us and enlighten them with Your Word, so that they would work in accordance with Your will and for the common good. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Blessed Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You sent Your Son that we might have healing through His wounds. Be with the sick, the hospitalized, the aged, the infirm, the dying and the troubled in mind or heart [*especially Your servants and those we name in our hearts*]. Help them to know Your presence and Your peace in their afflictions, and grant them healing and relief as You will. Teach them contentment of heart, and keep them in faith to the day of Christ's coming. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Blessed Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are the blessed and chosen people of Your grace and favour. You have called us by Your Word and gathered us by Your Spirit before this altar. Grant to us repentance and faith, that we may receive this Sacrament for our benefit and so be transformed by this blessed communion and be made more Christ-like in faith and service. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Blessed Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, though now we weep in the face of death, we rejoice to know the power of Christ and His resurrection. In this hope, we commend to You all the faithful who have died in Your faith and fear. Bring us with those who have fallen asleep in Christ to that blessed day when the dead shall be raised, when sin shall no more accuse, when death shall no more grieve and when we will live in Your presence forevermore. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All these things, blessed Father, and those things You know we need, we pray You to grant us for the sake of and because of the merits of Jesus Christ alone, with whom You live and reign, the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**