

HOMILY SUNDAY 06 – C
“The Beatitudes – Divine Reversal”
(Jeremiah 17:5-8; Psalm 1; 1 Cor 15:12, 16-20; Luke 6:20-26)

Who wants to be a millionaire?

Faith in Jesus can turn our values upside down.

The gospel today could be called a paradigm shift. That is a rather new term used by social scientists to describe the challenge to change that new technology often presents to us. An example might be the development of digital technology. When the Swiss watchmakers were offered the first chance to buy into this new technology, they refused, unable to believe that there might be a better way of making watches than their centuries-old tradition. That stand lost them about 75% of the market almost overnight, as the copyright went to Texas Instruments and a Japanese company.

The reality of a paradigm shift involves not only technology, but also our approach to social realities. One of our older Oblates mastered Cree and the French missionaries' way of writing it. Time marched on, however, and others at the University level developed a new standardized way of writing the language. When the Canadian Bible Society invited him to work with them in translating the bible into Cree using the new method, he refused, unable to let go of his way, with the result that most of his work is now of little value. He was left behind because he could not make this paradigm shift.

The gospel today presents us with what could be called a spiritual paradigm shift – a whole new way of looking at the world and its values. Even a cursory glance at our modern lifestyle reveals that the three great values of our world are possessions, prestige and raw power. Those who have riches consider themselves to be on top and blest while those who do not, envy them. Those who are famous or stars are considered to be on top of the world, while those who are not, envy them or wish they could be like them. Those who have political power consider themselves to be on top, and others envy them.

Just recently in the newspaper there was an article about “elected dictators” referring to the trend in South America for elected rulers to give themselves more and more power and control over the political and economic process in their countries. The age-old temptation to think that possessions, prestige and power are the way to the good life is as alive today as it was during the time of the Hebrews, the time of the historical Jesus as well as the centuries that followed.

It should not be a surprise that we would be challenged even today by the spiritual paradigm shift of the words of Jesus, were we to truly hear them and understand them. After all, do we not all, deep down, wish that we were millionaires? Could there be another, better way? Let's look at the gospel more closely.

This gospel written by Luke is different from the other Synoptic writers, and a masterpiece. First Luke sets the scene. Jesus comes down with the twelve, with a great crowd of his disciples, and a great multitude of folks, both Jewish and Gentile. What Luke is portraying to us is that this is the Super-bowl event of the gospels. Everyone is present, with high expectations, ready to listen to the “inauguration speech” of this Jesus, the “Magna Carta” of his reign.

To underscore the importance of the situation, Jesus looks at his disciples – in whom he is placing his hope – and begins to speak as a hush falls over the crowd. Imagine thousands of people expecting a fiery, pumped-up, go-out-and-get-the-Romans election speech – only to hear these surprising words from Jesus slice through their expectations and turn all their expectations upside down:

“Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, mourning, and put down – for everything will be reversed. Not only that - rejoice and leap for joy - for now you are like the prophets the ancestors treated the same way. On top of that, woe to you who are rich, well fed, uncaring and well thought of – you will lose it all, and be like the false prophets the ancestors promoted.”

Can you hear the silence; feel the confusion, the let-down the people that day must have experienced? In another passage in Luke when Jesus speaks the truth of their mistaken reading of the will of God and self-serving religion they crafted, the crowd got so enraged that they hustled Jesus out of the synagogue and wanted to throw him over a cliff! They were unable to make the shift into this new way of looking at reality, this paradigm shift.

Timothy Radcliffe, in his recent book, *What Is The Point of Being A Christian?* captures the newness of Christianity in the following words: “The difference is humility. Humility was despised by ancient pagan Rome and Greece. For Aristotle, humility was a vice. To be humble was to be low, despicable, beneath respect. Christianity turned this way of looking at the world upside down by proclaiming that humility is the typical Christian virtue and pride the greatest vice.” He continues to say that humility is not about being self-deprecating; it is about having self-respect and self-esteem based on the love of God for us as we are.

The world needs a new way of being, of seeing reality. Here are some startling statistics about the present state of affairs in the world. If the world’s population was compressed into a room of one hundred people, proportionately six people would possess 59% of the world’s wealth; eighty would live in substandard housing; seventy would be unable to read; fifty would suffer from malnutrition; one would be near death; one would be near birth; one (yes only one) would have a college education and one would own a computer. This needs to change and would change were we to see the world through the eyes of Jesus.

In the words of Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest and respected speaker, it is not about doing it right or being right, as the religious contemporaries of Jesus thought. Rather, it is all about being aware of our poverty and our inability to do it right, and trust in Jesus who

alone truly knows the mind of God and the values of God. Above all, it is about being in a right relationship with this God of Jesus Christ. For Rohr, good spirituality is about letting go (the opposite of what most people think) and also all about what we do with our pain (good spirituality deals with pain; a weak spirituality runs away from pain). He has an insight into the Beatitudes vision of Jesus.

The late Bishop Sheen, well known television communicator years past, stated that when he went to India, he met Christ in those who were suffering. They had not been told about Jesus, but they knew him in their poverty and suffering. They had an insight into the Beatitudes of Jesus.

Mark Pizantawatz, who developed the Return To Spirit healing process, teaches that to heal we must let go of resentment through acceptance; let go of a victim stance through responsibility; move away from withdrawal through ambition, and heal cynicism through inspiration. He is also touching on Jesus' beatitude way of looking at the world.

I have personally found that humble honesty, not denial and blame, is the key to personal healing and growth; that sharing and trust, not secrecy, is the key to inner freedom; that good grieving, forgiveness and acceptance, not revenge, is the key to peace, and that integrity and credibility, not phoniness, is the source of satisfaction and joy.

The late Oscar Romero, a conservative, legalistic priest when he was made bishop, was converted by the plight and the suffering of the poor in his diocese. He met Jesus in a different way through the experience of the poor, and underwent a profound conversion of his belief system and his attitude towards his society. He realized that all too often the authority of the Church sided with those in power - the government and the military that oppressed the poor and rewarded the Church for its complicity. His outspoken words of criticism of the status-quo led to his being shot while celebrating mass for a group of sisters. What happened to Jesus; happened to him. He became a martyr, and today his spirit lives on and gives hope to the poor, while those who were in power are forgotten.

The Eucharist we celebrate today is a revolutionary humble meal of faith, in quiet contrast to the superficial, hyped-up values of the world. Humble gifts of bread and wine are transformed by our communal prayer of faith into the very Body and Blood of Jesus who gave his life for the poor.

We who receive them with faith are in turn transformed into his Body, his apostles, his disciples, sent to continue his revolutionary message of love and new life for the poor, those who know they need God.

So, have faith in Jesus, let your values be turned upside down, and live the Beatitudes as you experience the kingdom of God growing within you and within the community of followers of Jesus.