

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A
Sir 15: 15-20; 1 Cor 2: 6-10; Mt 5: 17-37
February 12, 2023

This is the third Sunday in a row that the Gospel reading is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. In reflecting on these passages, the underlying principle behind these teaching of Jesus is that no permanent happiness can be found either in things or in relationships. To be poor in spirit means to realize the limitations of all human relationships and experiences when it comes to their ability to provide us with lasting happiness.

To appreciate that message from the Sermon on the Mount means we must unlearn some things that we have probably taken for granted since childhood, since we enjoyed the comforting touch of our mother, namely, that happiness is to be found in pursuing and getting the things that bring us satisfaction, whether it is money, property, power, status, popularity, friends or whatever are our desires. None of those will guarantee us happiness, not even all of them together. One can have them all and still be deeply unhappy, and spiritually bankrupt.

The Sermon on the Mount is an invitation to let go of the myth that “*things*” will bring us lasting happiness. Jesus is inviting us to be poor in spirit by putting what is most important ,our relationship with God, in first place. Jesus told us, “*Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice, and all things else will be added on.*” We cannot find God unless we are willing to let go of some things we believe are important to us.

Many Christians never search for God, I suppose, because they think they have already found him. In fact, they have not; they have only found an institution. Religion for them is an institution to which they belong, and that provides for them a certain sense of security.

It is a way of life, churchgoing, and guidance from the Bible, no cheating or swearing, democratic principles and being nice to their own people, those who live where they live, shop in the same store, look like they do, have the same beliefs and attitudes. They attend religious functions, Mass, Confession, Bible study groups, but their hearts are far from God. God is absent from their daily consciousness, except in the most perfunctory way; they are aggressive, unforgiving, judgmental, greedy, divisive, abusive, racist, and in addition, totally fixed in their ways, and unwilling to change or let go of anything. They never drink from the living waters if faith. Some people don't know God at all, and have no relationship with him. God is never

experienced by them as a living person to whom they actually talk or spend time with, person to person or from whom they seek consolation and comfort.

The poor in spirit, (on the other hand) are those who accept the fact that they need to change, maybe it is letting go of an ambition, an attitude, a habit, a relationship, the chance to make a lot of money in order to pursue their relationship with God. Because they are willing to set out on this journey, God meets them half way. They come under the influence of God's Spirit, and they begin to change.

The struggle within us is life-long, but there is also on this journey a taste of something, the personal experience of God's presence, love and power in our lives, that makes it all worthwhile.

That is the challenge of the Sermon on the Mount, and that is the promise and hope underlying its demands and teachings.

-Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.