**6th Per Annum, 2025**

I always admire S. Paul’s capacity for bluntness: “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

“if Christ has not been raised,” because the Resurrection changes everything, gives everything an eternal dimension, and gives *us* an eternal perspective on everything else. Case in point: the Beatitudes. So familiar to us, perhaps more so in Matthew’s eightfold version than Luke’s four, but some of the most memorable and quotable words of Our Lord. And they only make any sense *at all* in the light of the Resurrection.

What does Our Lord say? “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.” Why are the poor “blessed”? Because they will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. When? In the resurrection. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.” When? In the resurrection. “Those who weep shall laugh. When? In the Resurrection. In resurrection life will the hated and excluded and spurned “*on account of the Son of Man*” come into everlasting happiness, and on that score we call them happy, blessed, now, against all appearances.

But mark that: “on account of the Son of Man.” It can be easy to read the Beatitudes carelessly, and imagine that Our Lord is simply declaring that it is good to be poor, or hungry, or sorrowful, or hated, that such people have a special ticket to heaven, even perhaps to think that God somehow owes them that, because of their hard ride in this life.

That’s not what Jesus is saying at all. Perhaps that’s why, in Matthew’s account, we read that it is those who “hunger and thirst *for righteousness*” who are blessed, the “poor *in spirit*” who inherit the Kingdom. It’s a question of motivation, not of means. Doubtless there are vicious poor people as surely as there are vicious rich people, hungry folk with malice in their bellies and those who weep whose woe is of their own making. Only those who are poor or hungry or sad or hated “on account of the Son of Man,” who suffer, as S. Peter says, “as a Christian.” He says: “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed.”

Why then didn’t Jesus just say that, rather than focusing on the material condition of those He declares blessed, and those to whom He announces “Woe!”? Well, for one thing it is Our Lord’s way in His life on earth to speak to people of heavenly things in earthly terms, to use familiar things – harvests, houses, law-courts, plants and animals – to talk about what is unknown – heaven and holiness and salvation and grace.

For another, like so many of His words, these are meant as a challenge to His hearers, which includes us! By concentrating on material circumstances, Jesus is asking us to look at our hearts and at our lives, to ask where it is we put our hope and our trust, whether in creation or in the Creator.

And that’s a crucial question. “Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his strength,” says Jeremiah. “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust *is* the Lord.” That’s the basic choice we’re faced with: trust in God, and be blessed; trust in man and be cursed.

Put like that it sounds simple, doesn’t it? Who could possibly make the wrong choice between alternatives like that? Of course, that’s never how they appear on the ground: up close, with our eyes on this life, it can seem quite different. Life ‘in the world’ has a habit of obscuring life in the spirit, and our poor human reason so often wants to trust in man and man-made hope rather than in an obscure, even invisible, God.

And considered like that, from a worldly position rather than a heavenly one – we might say from the perspective of time rather than eternity – Christianity doesn’t necessarily seem like a good option. “If in Christ we have hoped for *this* life only,” that is to say, without hoping for risen life hereafter, “we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Why? Because life in Christ necessarily involves mortification & self-denial; it’s awkward, it gets in the way, it is – let’s admit it – really hard. Today is Septuagesima, three weeks out from Lent, when we would do well to think about what disciplines we’re going to take on in that sacred season: how we will fast – because we should – what we will do without – because we ought – how we will pray and give alms more and more earnestly.

*All* of that will involve difficulty, hardship, pain. *None* of that makes the least bit of sense unless we’re looking forward to a time when the hungry will be satisfied, *not* with food, but with God. When the poor will be made rich, heirs not of an earthly kingdom but of an heavenly one. When those who weep in this world for their sins and the sins of others will laugh, not in mockery or in jest but for the sheer joy of resurrection life. If none of that will come true, we may as well give up on all of this and spend our Sunday mornings/evenings elsewhere.

“But *in fact* Christ *has* been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” And that has changed everything. Because now we can look on all of this from the perspective of eternity, with resurrection-eyes. Now we can look on ourselves, not as cursed to eke out this little life with as much comfort as may be, and go quietly to oblivion, but as blessed, participating in the life of the Risen Christ, now in this life dimly and in part, but in the world to come, when we shall have ripened for the harvest, in fulness and in truth.

Christ, as S. Paul writes to the Galatians, has become a curse for our sakes, so that blessings might descend on us. He has entered into our spiritual poverty, known our hunger and wept for our calamity, so that we in turn might possess the Kingdom that is His by right; be satisfied, fearing no drought, and rejoice in the Lord always.

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord […] He is like a tree that is planted beside the flowing waters, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves shall never fade; and all that he does shall prosper.”