

Text: Luke 6:17-26  
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C  
17 February 2019  
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You've heard, probably, of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Today we have Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. Before Jesus delivers his sermon, he's spent all night up on the mountain, in prayer; whenever Jesus spends the night praying, especially on a high place like a mountain which indicates being closer to God to talk with God, that prayer always comes before Jesus gives an important teaching - and that happens today. In the morning, having spent all night in prayer, Jesus calls his disciples - those people who have left their normal daily lives to follow Jesus around Israel - Jesus calls his disciples to come up and join him on the mountain. There, Jesus chooses from his followers twelve people to be apostles, those twelve who will go out from the group and share Jesus' message.

Then Jesus and disciples, including the twelve apostles, head down the mountain to the plain, where a large crowd of people has gathered from all over Israel and from as far away as Tyre and Sidon, which are north in Syria and the people in Tyre and Sidon aren't Jewish. Why has this large crowd, Jews and non-Jews, come together over great distances to wait for Jesus at the foot of the mountain? The Church left those verses out from the reading, but it's important to know why those people were there, so here are the verses that got left out from the reading:

They had come to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch Jesus, for power came out from him and healed *all* of them. (vv. 18-19)

So there are two groups there on the plain: the disciples of Jesus, and a second, larger group of those who had not yet made the decision to follow Jesus, but who believed there was *something* here and needed Jesus to heal them. And notice: Jesus' compassion goes out to both groups, both to the committed and to the uncommitted. First, Jesus heals the diseases of all the uncommitted: they don't have to understand who Jesus is, or want to be his follower - power to heal simply flows out of Jesus to everyone there. And then, having addressed the needs of the crowd, Jesus turns to his disciples, his followers - people like us who have committed to Jesus - to give them reassurance that the problems they are experiencing in life, problems that may have come from following Jesus,

are going to be healed. Pay attention: Jesus isn't addressing spiritual problems; Jesus is talking about our economic and life situation problems. Blessed are you who are poor, for God's kingdom is yours. Blessed are you who are hungry, or weeping, or who are hated and excluded by other people because you are following me - all *these* problems will be healed, Jesus problems, just as he healed the illness of those who came to see him not really knowing who Jesus was, just knowing he probably could help them.

And we can't overlook the woes Jesus pronounces: woe to you who are rich, and satisfied, and comfortable now - because your judgment is coming. If you're offended by Jesus' words, remember: if you were wealthy in Jesus' day, it was because you were exploiting others and weren't concerned for their welfare. A contemporary version of Jesus' woes might be: Woe to you who are self-satisfied, who lack concern for others, and most of all, who have no concern for God. At least the crowd that gathered at the foot of the mountain were looking for a power great than themselves to help them; they knew they were needy.

We are the disciples of Jesus. We're here today because we want to be with Jesus, we've made the commitment to follow him. And Jesus is telling us he is very concerned with our life problems, with the challenges we face every day, and with the challenges we face by deciding to be a Catholic Christian. It is not easy in today's society to be a Catholic Christian, one because of the very public failures of our leadership - which *deserve* condemnation - but is also is not easy to be a Catholic Christian especially when we are labeled - and this unjustly - as uncaring, as hateful, as denying the rights of people because we have a different vision of life that sees a higher way and higher truth of life lived with God. Yet is in living out that vision, with all its challenges, that Jesus promises we will be satisfied, and flourish and bear fruit like the tree planted by the river of life flowing from God.