

Father Larry Richards

Moderator, Bread of Life Community

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Jeremiah 17:5

Good morning. Today, the Gospel is about the Beatitudes. But the Beatitudes begin, if you go to the first reading, if you will, to Jeremiah 17:5. The first line of the first reading is going to set us up. “ Thus, say the Lord, cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord. Cursed are those who try to live for the world” or seek all their stuff in the world. And that’s exactly what is happening when we get to the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes, of course, another way to say them is “be happy attitudes.” You want to be happy, this is the way it is. It’s not the way the world says. The world likes to tell us have lots of money, have lots of power, do it your way, get it all now, and you will be happy. Jesus says, no, turn that upside down. You’ve got to be a person who lives not for this world, but for the next, who counts not on human beings, but counts upon the Lord.

Of course, Matthew’s is different than Luke’s account of the Gospels. Matthew, when he does the Beatitudes, he says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Matthew, you will see if you ever read Matthew’s Gospel, doesn’t talk a lot about poverty. That’s not his thing. Luke loves to talk about poverty. That was his thing! And he changes “Jesus says (in Matthew) blessed are the poor in spirit.” Luke says, no, no, no, what He said is blessed are you poor, just be poor. A big thing if you look at the difference between the two Gospels. So blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are weeping, for you shall laugh. And now again, who wants to call someone blessed who are poor. Yeah, right, I’m really blessed Father if I am poor.

Have you ever met a really poor person? Someone who is not in America. You know, sometimes here poor people want everything. These poor people we call poor people, they eat everyday, they’ve got a VCR, they’ve got everything, they’ve got it all! But have you ever met someone who is really poor? In a third world country who doesn’t even know if they’re going to have dinner tomorrow or today? Poor! There is no one who has to starve in America, here anyway in Erie. You know there are places that have lunch, dinner, breakfast, lunch, dinner, breakfast every day, every day of the year. We are very good at reaching out, because in Erie, Pennsylvania, the Benedictine Sisters are extremely good at that. So we may have never

experienced that. But when Jesus was talking about poor, He's talking about someone who doesn't know where their daily food is coming from. So what do they know? They know they need to depend on God for that. Matthew could say the same thing. Blessed are the poor in spirit because what they know is I can't even take my next breath without God today, so to even breathe I've got to be poor knowing I depend fully upon God, rely fully upon God. Are we people, whether we have a lot of money in the bank, or whether we have no money in the bank, whether people consider us rich or poor, are we people who know that we have to rely fully upon God for even our next breath? Are we truly poor? Are we truly hungry, meaning do we hunger, do we yearn for God? Do we hunger not just for the bread of this world, but do we have a hunger for the bread of eternal life. Do I have a hunger to go to Mass? Blessed are you who are hungry, He says. Again, the world says, Are you nuts, Jesus?

This is Jesus talking about this is what it is to be a Christian. To live the Beatitudes. If you want to be happy, hunger. Hunger for holiness. Hunger for the Bread of Life. Hunger for love. Be like Jesus when He cries out, I thirst. We too need to thirst for souls, to have a hunger for the lost. We need to be blessed and be hungry, not for the things of this world, and most of us the problem is, are hungry for the things of the world. I want a new car, I want more money, I want everything the way I want it. But when it comes to the spiritual world of everlasting life, we don't have the same hunger. And so Jesus says, Blessed are they who are hungry. Or as Matthew would say, who hunger and thirst for holiness or righteousness. Blessed are you who are weeping. You see people who are weeping, it's a sad, sad thing. Usually when I see people weeping, I run the other way. I'm not good with tears. When someone cries, it drives me crazy. I get all nervous, and what am I going to do. And if it's a guy who cries, like one of my kids at Prep if I yell at them and they cry, I'll give them, OK, just don't cry, stop it, stop it, stop it. I can't take tears! It's just something I'm glad Jesus said., Blessed are those who are weeping. But that reality! Do we weep for our sins? Do we weep for the loss? Do we weep? We need to be blessed are those who weep for the right things. Not weep for self pity. But weep that God it of love, but weep for the people that don't know Jesus, but weep because I am a person who has sinned against the Lord. Blessed are you who weep over those things. You know, Francis of Assisi used to weep so much, whenever he saw two sticks cross, it would make a cross, he would weep for the love of God for him, who would give His life on the cross. Blessed are those who weep.

And then he says, Blessed are you when people hate you, and they exclude you, and they insult you, and they denounce your name as evil. I have always taken great comfort in this one. You know it's that great one. Because I am considered the nut of the diocese. The bishop considers me a nut, the priests consider me nuts, some of my parishioners who have left consider me nuts, kids at Prep think of me as a nut. Blessed are the persecuted. But sometimes when we take a stand for Christ, people think we are nuts. If everybody thinks we are the greatest people in the world, there is a problem. We should be causing controversy. When people are sinning, and we say, you know that's sinful what you are doing, they're not going to like us. That's just the way it is. When we say things as they are, how come we don't love Jesus more. When I was in the seminary and I preached, my professor, the guy who expelled me, (of course you all know by now I was expelled from seminary), and the guy who expelled me was my formation director and he was also my preaching instructor. And the very first homily I ever gave I talked about that everybody is called to be a saint. And when I was done with my homily, he looked at me

and he said, First of all, I don't want to be a saint. And second of all, who are you to tell people they are called to be saints. Oh. My second homily, which again I will never forget, was everybody is called to have a daily prayer life. Everybody should be praying every day. And it was videoed, and when the guy got done, he said, Larry, you don't expect people who are making \$75,000 a year to have a daily prayer life. And I said, Yeah. And he said, "Boy, you don't know where people are at, do you?" And so with that, he said I was a Pollyanna (you know what a Pollyanna is). Can you imagine someone saying I'm a Pollyanna? And he said, I was a Pollyanna, and it says I didn't like that on my evaluation, so you can never look it up if you ever look at my records, it says he struck Pollyanna. And he said, Our main concern with Larry is excessive optimism. The exact line was, "Our main concern with Larry is an apparent self-knowledge which expresses itself in an excessively optimistic attitude toward life." Excessively optimistic! This is you pastor they are talking about! Can you imagine? That's what they said. And yet God had greater plans. But again, sometime people will look at us and think of us as a little nuts or a little off, and that's OK. That's what God wants.

So what we need to be doing today is, we need to be looking at this Word of God and take our lives and place it against it. Am I a person who's poor, and I know that everything is dependent upon God? Do I hunger for God, do I hunger for His Word, do I hunger for the lost, do I hunger for His Bread of Life, do I hunger for holiness? Do I weep for my sins? Do I weep for the lost? Do I weep that God is not loved? And then do people look at me and persecute me for being a "Jesus freak," a nut, someone who does things just a little bit different than the world? Because remember, this world is not our home. We are just passing through. We shouldn't be too comfortable here. And the world shouldn't accept us as its own.

But today, let us take the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His way of life with the Beatitudes, and try them on. And where they don't fit, let's ask Jesus for the grace to change. You got it? You get it? Good! May each of you know His love, today and forever. Amen