

6th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 6:17, 20-26

This Gospel, known as the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount, is often translated from the original Greek as “happy are they” rather than “blessed are they.” In the original Greek the word is μάκαριος. The Greeks used to call the island of Cyprus “Makaria,” meaning the “Island of Joy.” It was a beautiful island with a pleasant climate and abundant resources meaning that the islanders were self-sufficient and in need of nothing. So when the Lord spoke of μάκαριος or “blessedness”, He meant something that is a joy within itself and a joy that is not dependent on circumstances because it is found in something that is unchanging.

When Christ says blessed are you when you are poor or hungry or oppressed or hated or in mourning, He does not mean to say that poverty or hunger or oppression or grief is a blessing in itself, but rather it is a blessing if it is borne in faith in God. That is because God is beyond the forces of change and is the one and only thing in the universe that never changes. In God we have that which is certain. In a world that changes year by year God is the one constant in our life—the same yesterday as He is today and as He will be tomorrow. So by bearing the great pains of our lives in faith they find their fulfillment or their meaning in God; because these sufferings are no longer an end in themselves but have purpose, and so we are blessed. That is why prophet Jeremiah, from the first reading, says: “Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.” We will be like a tree planted by a river; in spite of a drought we will always have our roots close to the water and our leaves will stay green.

The Saints are examples of this trust. In the nineteenth-century in Canada there was a nun called Sr. Marie Anne Blondin. She lived at a time of widespread illiteracy, and at the age of twenty-two, she herself still was unable to read or write. At that time the law decreed that boys were not to be taught by women and girls were not to be taught by men. As such, Sr. Marie Anne sought to have a school founded for the education of poor children, both boys and girls in the same school, so as to make education more widely available to those in the country. The bishop gave his permission and the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne was founded and schools were soon built. However, the Priest assigned as the chaplain to the order was abusive, interfering in the personal lives of the nuns by preventing them from making their confession to any other Priest but himself and raising the school fees making it too expensive for many families to pay. Sr. Marie Anne went to the bishop to tell him of the difficulties she was facing at the school. The bishop, far from supporting her, told her that she must resign as the head of the order and called for elections for a new Mother Superior. He said that even if she were to be re-elected she was to refuse to accept. Sr. Marie Anne, the foundress of the order was now banned to lead the order she founded. Rather than complain, Sr. Marie Anne wrote: "As for me, my Lord, I bless Divine Providence a thousand times for the maternal care she shows me in making me walk the way of tribulations and crosses."

Sr. Marie Anne was now banned from any involvement in the running of the order she founded and was sent to work in the laundry, where she remained for the rest of her life. But in that basement laundry she inspired many young nuns who learnt from her the the beauty of humility and of finding a blessing in the midst of suffering. When asked why she put up with the abuse she suffered, she answered: "The deeper a tree sinks its roots into the soil, the greater are its chances of growing and producing fruit."

Blessed Marie Anne Blondin saw in her suffering the blessing that only God could give, and just as Christ sacrificed His life for the eternal life it would grant to us, she sacrificed her pride for the sake of the life it would give to the order she founded. At her death she said to the sisters: "May Holy Eucharist and perfect abandonment to God's Will be your heaven on earth."