

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A We're Fortunate Ones

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Sometimes we can read “the beatitudes” of this week’s gospel as “the platitudes”, allowing them to wash over us as high-minded mystical goals, inspiring for Galilean peasants back in Jesus time but without relevance to our own.

Both in Jesus’ time and our own, many are made demonstrably miserable by their poverty, either actual existential poverty which may involve pain and early death or relative poverty with its not dissimilar effects. Jesus never suggests that the poor are somehow a distinct category better than anyone else. Rather, they are regular flesh and blood, fallible people – sinful, meek, sometimes hungry, persecuted, mourning, thirsting for righteousness. Though at first glance they might seem to be unfortunate, Jesus calls them “blessed”, meaning neither “holy” or “happy” but rather “fortunate”.

Immersed in the lives and sufferings of the Galilean peasants, he identifies with their hunger, thirst and despair in the clutches of rapacious landlords and re-assures them that God has it under control. He wants to see them happy and laughing. The Good News he brings is of good times; of God who loves all his creatures and whose Kingdom empowers us to work to implement his justice. The beatitudes aren’t stagnant platitudes but, as those first Galilean peasants heard them, the Good News of God’s love for them and their mission in the Kingdom – being a courageous, gentle, comforting, merciful, pure, peacemaking presence to others.

In modern times we might be re-assured of “good times” but also challenged to live out God’s Word in the Kingdom: mourning for the sin and harshness of the world and resolved to make positive change. We are “fortunate” in our pro-active quest for justice and peace; to feed, clothe and house the homeless; our merciful forgiveness of those who hurt us; our meek consideration of others feelings; our courageous hunger and thirst for righteousness and our preparedness to be mocked by oppressors.