

6th Sunday of the Year C 2010

*If for this life only we have hoped in Christ,
we are the most pitiable people of all.*

This is the rock solid faith of Christianity and the rock solid faith of Israel as we heard in Jeremiah, *Blessed is the one.. whose hope is the LORD*, that one is truly blessed only if one trusts in God and places all hope in God. Such faith provides the only solid foundation for true hope for the future, in spite of whatever evil and suffering the world can throw at one. There is hope because there is a God who is worthy of our complete trust, worthy of our placing our hope in His love and in his providence that carries us over the troubled waters of this life to a reward that is, as Jesus teaches us, “great in Heaven.”

Without belief in God, trust and hope in God, there is really no such thing as personal hope for the future, that future, for instance, that Marxist atheists proclaim when all evils in this world will be conquered and all men will live in a Utopia of peace and material well being. That hope is the last and greatest illusion of man, that he can make this world perfect by his own efforts, if only he discovers the secret to man’s misery in the economic and political orders. Ironically, Marxists and other atheists in our world say that God is the illusion and Heaven is part of that great illusion that distracts man from making this world a paradise. They cannot prove that God is an illusion, they can only assert it, and yet how often the atheistic dream of a perfect world has been smashed by reality, the horrors of the French revolution, the horrors of the totalitarian states based on Marxism or some other form of atheism as in Hitler’s case. Hundreds of millions of innocent people have been murdered, exterminated by these godless ideologies in the cause of a future perfect humanity that is never coming. That is the great illusion of modern man, that he can remake the human person and human society for the future Utopia that never arrives.

The biblical hope is rooted in a faith that teaches us that this world is not perfectible by man, because man is not perfectible by man. Only God who created man can perfect man, and this will not happen in this world because

man is by his sinfulness a rebel against God. That is why religion, especially the true religion of Jesus Christ is always under persecution in this world, because it does not accept the lie that man is without sin and can perfect his own nature by human means. True religion is persecuted because it points out the monstrous evils committed against countless victims by sinful men, generation after generation, no matter what the economic system or form of government. Some economic and political systems are better than others, surely, but in the end they all commit crimes against humanity. It is man's sin that causes all the evil in this world, and unless men turn from sin to the only source than heal them, the God who created them and redeemed them by his own blood, then there is no hope for them, in this world or the future world.

The Bible teaches us that this world is always the battleground between good and evil, and evil often wins the battle. If man trusts in God, however, the victory of evil will not be permanent, and God will reward those who suffer innocently the pains and misfortunes brought on by the evil of others. If our own evil, sin, is the cause of our suffering, then we obviously cannot expect a reward for that, but we do have access to forgiveness by God and the chance to start anew and gain heaven by the way we choose to live our lives. We may not always prosper in this world, but our hope is not limited to this world either.

Belief in a future reward in heaven, if we patiently and innocently suffer wrong in this world, is the strongest motive for carrying on in the midst of trials and the strongest barrier of seeking revenge by returning evil for evil. It is that desire for revenge that perpetuates the cycles of violence and evil that plague our world. Those who suffer evil rather than commit evil for the sake of revenge are the greatest peacemakers in human history. They can forgive because they look forward to a reward that this world can never give, the reward Jesus promises in the Gospel for those who suffer injustice on account of their faith:

... when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.

Jesus is not saying that we are blessed simply because we suffer these unjust persecutions, or, looking at the other beatitudes, simply because we are poor, or simply because we are hungry or weeping because of the conditions we live in, the injustices of this world, even the evils caused by nature itself, etc. But we will be blessed only if we act in all these situations *for his sake*, and as he did, with mercy and forgiveness rather than with returning evil for the evil done to us.

Christians always look to the future with hope, not because they think they will arrive at some earthly paradise where man no longer does evil and is perfect in his way of living. Christians know that this world is still the domain of evil, since Satan lives and man is ever a sinner. But Christians know that they do not have to be part of that evil that penetrates our world. Jesus Christ has made it possible for us first to conquer the evil in our own hearts so that we can assure the unending presence of goodness in our world, a goodness that in the end always triumphs over evil and ever prevents that dominion of evil from being complete. After all Jesus, on the night before he died said to his Apostles, “*do not be afraid. I have conquered the world.*” He did not triumph over evil by force, or by armies, or by any earthly power, or even his divine power, but simply by suffering all the evil that men could do to him, and then rising triumphantly from the dead.

It’s a terrible thing to have no hope in the future or to despair that there really is a future to hope in, a God who is that future. If the future comes to mean for us only the future *in time*, the future of *this* world, then for countless poor and suffering men and women there can be no hope. That is what the godless, unwittingly perhaps, have been trying to do to the poor – to deprive them of all hope by depriving them of their only hope, the hope that there is a God who rewards the victims of evil who put their trust in him, and who punishes the evils that are never truly requited in this world. Only if I can believe that there is a true final justice that rewards the innocent who suffer, and trust in God, and that God punishes the evil of those who despoil his creation, only then can I hope, and only then can I refuse to take justice into my own hands and end up inevitably returning evil for evil.

I must be honest. If I did not believe in a God of mercy and justice, true justice, whether accomplished in this world or in the next, then I would despair of any real possibility of peace in this world. I can refuse to become the seeker of revenge only because I believe that every crime, every evil, from the slightest to the greatest will be recompensed by God, if not in the courts of this world, and that every evil suffered without resorting to taking justice into my own hands will be rewarded by the God of mercy. That is why unbelievers who seek a perfectly just world must inevitably turn to violence, revolution, hatred, all of which is magnified by the despair they hold in their hearts because down deep they know that what they preach and promote is in the end hopeless.

How beautiful those words in our first reading truly are when read in the light of the promises of Jesus in the beatitudes:

Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.

When true, believing Christians feel the **heat of evil**, poverty, hunger, weeping at injustice, persecution, still their leaves, **their souls**, stay green because they do not succumb to that heat. And in the year of drought, the evil times, those who put their trust in God know no distress, **despair**, and still they bear fruit, their reward. For they know by faith that the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs, and that their consolation, their reward “will be great in heaven.” Like their Master, they will return good for evil, a great struggle for men, and they will find their victory already in this world when evil cannot conquer their goodness; but they will find their final victory only where He did, in their resurrection of the just to glory.