6th Sunday in OT 2025

You don’t have to be a saint to pray; nor does prayer consist of long fancy words and phrases! Prayer is for people like us, especially when we are lost for words, and even more especially when life is muddled or messy. The following advice was once offered by a great teacher of prayer, St Teresa of Avila; “Stand or sit reverently and silently in the Lord’s presence – imagine the Lord himself at your side. Stay with this good friend as long as you can. Do not be concerned about conversation”. In that silence we will hear more clearly that which the Lord wishes to say to us.

We hear in today’s Gospel passage that, *“fixing his eyes on his disciples”* Jesus spoke to them. We are the disciples of today, and through the Gospel Jesus speaks to us about unprecedented problems facing our world. Fr Andriy Zelenskyy, a chaplain in the Ukrainian Army, recently noted in an interview, “One of the hardest things is witnessing to the destruction of humanity……humanity is under attack today”. We see this, not only in the war zones of the world, and in the suffering of innocent civilian populations of those lands; we recognise it when governments class migrants, seeking a decent living, as criminals; when unborn life is destroyed, and when the life of the old and sick comes to be viewed as a burden on society. Wherever the essential human dignity of the person is undermined, or abused, humanity is under attack.

Pope Francis constantly exhorts, “Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! *(MV15)*. His predecessor, Pope Benedict XV1, once commented, “closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God” *(DCE 16).*

Today, standing beside us, and *“fixing his eyes on his disciples””,* Jesus speaks to us, speaks to us as individuals, and as a community, and says *“Happy, that is, blessings on, the poor, the hungry, on those who weep, and the persecuted”.* By blessing them, Jesus was not saying that their condition was a happy one, or that they were good or virtuous, only that they suffered unjustly. He took their side, not because they deserved it, but because they needed it. Without judging them in anyway whatsoever, Jesus offers them hope and the possibility of recovering their dignity.

The poor he spoke about, were not the spiritually poor, but the impoverished and marginalised, whom he met on the roads and in the towns. The ordinary people, at that time, could barely scrape a living, as they were harassed and exploited by the corrupt and the powerful. Jesus reproached *“the rich”* who were, by-in-and-large, the money loving-pharisees, the greedy tax collectors, and the abusive military. The poor are still with us – everyday throngs of people flee from absolute poverty, so desperate, that they risk life itself for the sake of a better life. Their desperation must surely pierce our souls and touch our hearts – just as it did Jesus.

Famine was a feature of the ancient world and continues to be so in today’s world. When Jesus spoke about the hungry, he was referring to the truly starving, the needy and the neglected, and was pointing the finger at the rich *“who feast magnificently each day” (Luke 16:19).* Statistics reveal how much food is wasted each day in the Western World, while news reports show children, with lifeless eyes and extended abdomens, in lands such as Yemen, Sudan, Gaza. Is it any wonder Jesus declares, *“Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry”.* Justice will be done.

St Matthew, writing about King Herod’s massacre of the Holy Innocents, notes, *“A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loudly lamenting: it was Rachel weeping for her children” (Mt.2:18).* Day-after-day, we see images of mothers, and fathers, weeping over the dead bodies of their children - the innocent victims of warfare. But the armaments that killed them are produced by wealthy nations who then close their borders and turn their backs on the refugees generated by those weapons. Jesus says, *“Alas you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep”.* There will be a day of justice.

We are aware that the persecution of those who bear the name of Christ is greater now than at any time in history. We are also aware that even in so-called diverse and pluralist societies who pride themselves as being exemplars of tolerance, such as in Ireland, public display of religious conviction, is considered by many as politically incorrect. It appears that to be considered sophisticated in today’s society it is necessary to ridicule the faith of others. Jesus says, *“Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets”.*

Through today’s Gospel passage Jesus does indeed speak to the heart of each one of us:

*Lord Jesus,*

*Open our eyes to the reality of our world;*

*teach us to share the tears of our brothers and sisters;*

*give us souls that hunger for justice and love;*

*make us strong for the sake of your name.*  **Amen.**