

Homily: Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C) 2022

Suppose I told you that I can make you really rich, make sure your every need is satisfied, entertain you without fail and ensure that people will always revere you. You probably wouldn't believe me, of course. But if you did believe me – if everyone believed me – I suspect the church would be packed out every Sunday. That's because these things – wealth, gratification, entertainment and a good reputation – are things that people instinctively seek; they are the main aims of the world. Jesus, perhaps shockingly, says “alas” for people who have all these things, and tells us that blessed rather are those who are poor, hungry, sorrowful and those who are despised. The values of the world are clearly not those of Jesus or His followers. He turns everything upside down.

We are His followers. So what does this message mean for us? Not, perhaps, to seek poverty, hunger, sorrow or bad reputation for their own sake. Jesus didn't seek these things for their own sake either, but He accepted and welcomed them when they were necessary for His mission and His life of perfect love. But it certainly does mean that we should not count them as our main goals: instead, we are to follow Jesus, putting Him first, before these luxuries and even these comforts. This is tough! It can mean a radically different life: think of St Francis of Assisi, or our own patron, St Clare: they both give up riches to live a life of great poverty at the service of the Gospel.

Hearing Jesus teach, “Blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who are despised” also invites us to ask: how are we a blessing to those who suffer through poverty, hunger, grief, or a bad reputation? How do we bring, as a parish and as individuals, something of God's love and blessings to them?

Jesus turns our values upside down. Everything is different with Him. About twenty years ago there was a film called *The Sixth Sense*. It told the story of a troubled boy who claimed to see ghosts, and the psychologist who helped him. If you've seen the film, you'll know that at the end there is a twist: something is revealed which changes the whole meaning of the story. I rarely watch films twice, but I went back and watched this again, because seeing the film knowing what is revealed at the end makes the story look quite different. The events of the story have a different meaning; they are seen through a new lens. Our resurrection will be like this. Our lives will look entirely different in its light. When we stand on the threshold of eternity, and our new life is revealed, every event of our lives will look different, including those times when we have experienced poverty, hunger, grief or rejection. We will see what life is for and we will see how God has been leading us to Him and to the life He promises.

In today's second reading, St Paul insists on the resurrection: the truth that Jesus has risen, and that His resurrection guarantees ours. He calls Jesus the “first fruits”: He is the beginning; the rest of the harvest (in other words, us) will follow. Jesus' life only made sense in the light of His resurrection. The things He did and taught, and especially His death, only found meaning when He rose from the dead. Only then, when the disciples finally

believed that He had risen, did they also begin to understand His life and teaching. And it will be the same for us too. Our lives will look different in the light of our resurrection.

We cooperate with the Lord on our journey to eternal life. This means trusting Him, His presence and action in life. It's not always obvious how we are to move forward; we need faith and God's guidance. But in light of today's readings let's at least remember this: there will come a time when we will experience the resurrection; we will look back on our lives in a completely new way. And we will see what's gone well, and what's really gone badly; what's been productive and what's been wasteful. We will stand before God and look back with Him over our lives. Not just to see what we did right and what we did wrong, but also: What were my priorities? What did I invest in? What did I care about? Did I live seeking only the things of the world: riches, gratification, entertainment and status? Or did I invest in growing in love, in becoming the person God wants me to be, in developing my relationship with Him? Our lives, our choices, our priorities will look different in the light of the resurrection. At some level, faith is simply the ability to at least begin to think now from this new perspective: to see everything in light of eternity.

Fr Andrew

