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BLESSED ARE YOU WHO ARE POOR.. WOE TO YOU WHO ARE RICH.

Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

LINK VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgsc3fyikMs>

Luke 6, 17.20-26

And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon,

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

“... there will be no poor among you;” This is the will of God, we find in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 15, 4 and then we find its realization in the Acts where the evangelist writes that the early Christian community testified strongly to the resurrection of Christ because none of them were in need. For this reason the poor are unfortunate that it is the task of the Christian community to remove them from their condition of poverty. Jesus never proclaimed the poor blessed, the poor are unfortunate, as it is the task of the Christian community to remove them from their condition.

The beatitudes are found in two versions: in Matthew’s gospel there are eight, where Jesus talks to those that must choose to enter into his condition, for this Jesus speaks of the poor of spirit, for an inner strength. In Luke’s gospel which we examine now, at chapter 6,17, poverty is a condition that the disciples have already chosen. Therefore Jesus never claims the poor blessed that the society has made so, but those that freely and voluntarily have entered into this condition and are not blessed because they are poor, they are blessed by God's response to their choice.

Let’s read Luke’s gospel, *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”* you that have made this choice. The evangelist had written, for all who had left everything and followed Jesus, they are blessed, that is, fully happy, which is not a static but dynamic condition in the making, *“.. for yours is the kingdom of God.”* Meaning that God will take care of you. Jesus has come to bring the Kingdom of God, an alternative society where, rather than accumulating for oneself, one shares generally with others and to those that do this there is God’s reply that he will

take care of you and any negative elements of this choice, the need and persecution, are neutralized by the Father's action.

And Jesus warns *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"* What is the reason for this persecution? That the beatitude of the poor makes a person fully free. Jesus says *"...on account of the Son of Man!"* the Son of man is the man that has the divine condition, therefore a man fully free. And the institution, every institution either religious or political, dislike people free and therefore persecution is unleashed. But Jesus says "don't worry because God is on your side" God, between those who persecute and those who are persecuted, he is always on the side of the persecuted. This is why Jesus says *"Rejoice..."* and then adds *".... for so their fathers did to the prophets."*

For Jesus the role of the disciple in the Christian community is that of a prophet, who is the prophet? He who makes the invisible God visible in his existence, above all else who, in harmony with God, widens the horizon of communication between God and men.

But, after having proclaimed fully happy those who have made this choice of sharing because this is what it is, Jesus then has a "funeral" lament for the rich. It is translated with *woe* but they are not threats, nor curses, but a commiseration. "*woe*" refers to the Jewish expression "*hoi*" that was a funeral lament. Jesus cries already the death of the rich, those that rather than sharing with others accumulate for themselves

Let us not forget that it is Luke the Evangelist, who tells us of the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus, the rich man who lives only for himself and is condemned not because he mistreated the poor man, but simply because he ignored him in his life.

Then Jesus takes pity on them, which could be translated as "*ahimè*" or "*ahivoi*" *"Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."* Meaning you that have caused the hunger and the sufferance and Jesus cries for them as dead. In the gospel the teaching of Christ is that one only possesses what one gives. What one keeps for himself is not possessed, but it possesses him. These rich people believed they possess goods, but in fact they were possessed by their goods, they gave worship to mammon, to interest and convenience which destroyed them

Jesus' last warning says *"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."* The idea of the authenticity of the disciple, or prophet is seen in the relationship with the system: if the system praises, thanks and rewards you, you are seen to be a false prophet. If the system persecutes you it means the contrary, following Jesus, but only going against the current one finds the water always crystal clear and fresh.