

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Making Room for God

In today's Gospel we hear the beatitudes. But they are not the beatitudes we are used to. They are not the nine beatitudes from the *Gospel of Matthew*. There are only four beatitudes. And these are followed by four woes. Today's Gospel is from the *Gospel of Luke*. Instead of "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven," we hear, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God." *Luke* is telling those who are poor, hungry, weeping, hated, excluded, insulted, and denounced that they are blessed. And he's telling those who are not suffering, those who are rich, filled with food, laughing, and treated with respect that they will suffer.

What are we to make of this? Is it good to be poor? Should we, like St. Francis of Assisi, throw away all our possessions and become beggars? Well, that can't be what the Lord is saying. After all, if everyone became a beggar, there would be nobody to beg from. God created all the wonderful things of the world. Does God want us to suffer for enjoying his gifts? That can't be correct either.

So what is this all about?

This has less to do with material possessions as it has to do with the person who possesses them. It really has a lot to do with us and our present situation in society.

We need to be open to God to let him into our lives. If we make room for God, we will make room for others in our lives.

We need to be open to God to let him into our lives.

How can we be open to God, though, when we have so much else on our minds? So many of us, beginning with me, are glued to our devices. I have no idea how many times I look at my iPhone on an average day, but I can assure you that I would be embarrassed to know that number. In fact, I shudder to think of the number of hours a day I spend looking at some screen or other. And I don't even play video games.

I notice that when I go on a retreat, I feel I am so much closer to God than when I am home. I'm sure that one of the reasons for this is that I am not tied down to devices. I am making more room for Him in my life.

Perhaps, you also can see a bit of this in your lives. We, you and I, need to regulate our use of devices not because they are bad, but because they can take up time in our lives and space in our hearts that could be occupied by the One who loves each of us and calls us to love. You and I need to make time for prayer. And if we say, "My day is so busy as it is," then we need to remind ourselves that in many ways we have allowed our modern technological society to make our lives busy.

Secondly, we need to make room for others in our lives. In the *Gospel of Luke*

the Lord tells a parable of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. This is not the Lazarus who Jesus raises from the dead. That's his friend and the brother of Martha and Mary in the *Gospel of John*. The Lazarus of *Luke* is a character in a parable. This Lazarus is a poor man covered in sores. He sat at the gate of a rich man's house. He was starving and longed to eat just the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Then they both die. Lazarus goes to heaven. The rich man to hell. Why does the rich man go to hell? He's there because he was so full of himself and his stuff that he didn't even notice Lazarus. He would walk past Lazarus every single day as he entered his house for another lavish meal. He didn't see the poor man. There was no room for Lazarus in the rich man's life. And because there was no room for Lazarus, there was no room for God.

If we want to love and be loved we need to have space at the center of whom we are. And then Goodness will enter our hearts. This was the opening prayer in today's Mass: *"O God, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true, grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling pleasing to you."*

On October 26, 2018, Fr. Thomas Keating died at St. Joseph's Trappist Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. Fr. Keating left the world with a great gift. This was his writing about Centering Prayer. Fr. Keating's passion was to lead human beings to experience the unconditional "love beyond love that is God's Presence within us, and to have that love lead us to respect, befriend and love one another." He encouraged people to restore and renew an ancient way of developing a loving disposition of heart. Centering Prayer involves sitting in silence and gently letting go of all thoughts and sensations and giving ascent to the Presence of God whose love is constant, trustworthy, gentle and safe. The changes we all seek in our lives and our worlds begin within. The sacred place of transformation is where we are. This disposition of heart leads us to love and to respect one another. It helps us fight off the temptation to let our possessions define who we are.

We say that we care about those who are suffering, but do we? Do we really care about them? Do we even have room in our heart for those who are hurting, or are we satisfied with walking right by them, and, God forgive us, not even making eye contact.

We can not reach out to others if we are all wrapped up in ourselves.

The principle running through all the beatitudes in *Luke* is this: we are blessed if we do not cram ourselves full, leaving no room for that which matters. We are blessed if we allow ourselves to have that wonderful empty space that can become a spacious home for God and for other human beings.

There is only one reality, only one Being who can give us the bread of life, who can satisfy our deep hunger for love.

Blessed are we if we let go of all that is cluttering our lives. Then we can fly into

the arms of our Divine Lover. Then we can be lovers.