

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Sep 11th 2013

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

There are ways of reading Luke’s beatitudes that exclude some readers. Am I poor, hungry, weeping, or persecuted? I have not sat in a jail cell, slept on a park bench, stood in line for a free meal, hung out at the library to stay warm, lost custody of my children, sunk into depression, or spent my old age alone. This is not who I am.

Of course, we care. We see photos of children in refugee camps next to news stories of golf tournaments as we chew our breakfast. Troubled by the state of things, we give time and money. But neither the poor nor the rich live on my street. Their reality is not mine. Without a job, my savings would carry me a few months until foreclosure came knocking. I am not poor but please don’t call me rich.

So who is blessed? Is it a cop-out to open wide the beatitudes to include those like me who do not struggle just to survive? In *Building our House on Rock*, Fr. Dennis Hamm says that in Luke’s gospel the poor includes all “who know their need for God” (55). Like food, air, and friends, is my need for God how I make it through the day? Has darkness loomed beside me and sent me stumbling toward the light? Does hunger for God start my day and carry me into the night? Then I too belong to the kingdom.

The poor show us the way. Those facing troubles they can’t hide have much to teach the rest of us. Blest are those who know in their bones that they cannot make it on their own. Blest are those who know they are in trouble and seek help. Blest are those who trust that help will come. Blest are those who do not seek vengeance or nurse hatred. Blest are those who give people another chance. Blest are those who trust that God is for real. They show folks like me the way.

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