

February 17 Homily Deacon Don

Jesus has a way of really shaking us up, doesn't he? If you were paying attention to that Gospel passage – and I'm sure you were – you had to have felt at least a little bit of resistance to what Jesus was saying – maybe even a lot of resistance. Consider what happens.

Jesus had spent the previous night in prayer. All night he prays because he is going to do something important and he wants special help from the Father. A good example to all of us. The next morning he calls his disciples and from them he picks 12 to be his special followers to be apostles, those who would be sent forth to preach the Gospel. But before he sends them forth he has some important lessons to teach them. So he leads them down the mountain to the plain where a large crowd of people are gathered. Then he looks his disciples in the eye and says to them, "Blessed are you poor, for the kingdom of God is yours,"

Now can you imagine how Peter and the others react to something like that? I can just see Peter turning to his brother Andrew and their fishing partners, James and John, and shaking his head, saying something like, “What’s this all about? Where’s he coming from? Who ever heard of a kingdom that was full of poor people?” And what came after was no better!

Blessed are you who are hungry? Who weep? Who are hated? Who are excluded and insulted? What’s going on here?” Well, the very least that’s going on is that Jesus is letting them know that something different is happening. His kingdom will not be the same as other kingdoms. It will be a place where the poor are respected because they are children of God. It will be a place where the homeless will find shelter, where the hungry will be fed, where the mourning will be comforted, and those who are sad will rejoice.

Well if the disciples felt some resistance to what Jesus was saying and we, too, perhaps feel some resistance, consider Jeremiah, whom we heard about in the first reading. God called Jeremiah to be a prophet. Now this was the last thing in the world Jeremiah wanted to do and he resisted. He knew how prophets were treated: badly. People didn't want to hear their message because it was challenging, challenging in much the same way as was Jesus' message in the Gospel. And so Jeremiah said, "Don't call me, I'm too young." God said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of you." Jeremiah said, "I can't talk, I'm a stutterer." God said, "Don't worry. I'll put my word into your mouth." And you know what? That's exactly what happened. And once Jeremiah got a taste of God's word, he could not stop talking. He could not stop preaching the message of God to the people.

In the passage we heard as our first reading we hear God speak to Jeremiah. The prophet has spent

some years preaching and exactly what he expected has happened. He has been persecuted and his message has not been heard and he is feeling bad about that. So God speaks to him to console him. God tells him he is blessed. He is blessed just like those people Jesus talks about in the Gospel. He is blessed because he has accepted the task God gave him and in spite of the difficulties, he has placed his trust in the Lord.

Well, what about us? Basically I think we can all be blessed if we, too, place our trust in the Lord, no matter what. Do we have to give up all our possessions and become really poor, economically poor, in order to be blessed and be part of the kingdom of God? I don't think so. But we do have to be ready to do things, maybe some very big and important things to respond to God's call.

Just to give some examples I know a business man who spends eight or ten hours in an office and then dedicates at least two evenings a week to

mentoring an inner city boy, helping him with homework, taking him to a ball game, or just shooting some hoops in the back yard. And again there are others like him.

Then too there are the countless mothers and fathers whose lives are filled with the many tasks and responsibilities involved in bringing up their children, loving them and teaching them to love one another and their neighbor as well – not always an easy thing to do.

Finally I think of my grandnephew. We celebrated his eighth birthday with a fine dinner and a big birthday cake and ice cream. After dinner we were watching the news on TV and there was a story about people starving in Africa. We saw pictures of little children with swollen bellies and my nephew asked his mother, “What’s the matter with them?” She told him that they were hungry, that they did not get enough to eat. After a few seconds of reflection he looked at his parents and said, “We

ought to send them the rest of the birthday cake.” I thought, “Isn’t this great! We have a budding social activist in the family.”

I read an article in America magazine by, Daniel Harrington who comments on today’s readings this way: **Jesus knows that true happiness consists in right relationship with God, and that of themselves money, food, laughter, and celebrity cannot bring real happiness. He insists that what can make us truly happy and really blessed is a singular dedication to God and God’s Kingdom.**

The question for us of course is how do we in our lives show that singular dedication? Like the business man and so many others who dedicate their lives to direct service of the poor? Like so many good mothers and fathers whose lives are filled with providing a healthy, loving home for their children? Or like my grandnephew willing to share what we have with those in need?

Lent will be here very soon; it's a special time to think about our response to the needs of the world. Last Sunday we heard God say to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, who will go for us?" And the prophet answered. "*Here I am, send me.*" **Can we be bold enough to respond with the grace of God, "Here I am, send me"?**