

Detachment from Material Things

Jer. 17: 5-8; Ps. 1; 1 Cor. 15: 12, 16-20; Lk. 6: 17, 20-26

At first glance, the Gospel for this Sunday appears to be Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount that we encountered in Matthew's Gospel. We read the Beatitudes: *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God...* and so on.

But as we ponder the Gospel more deeply, we realize that it does not describe the Sermon on the Mount event. Firstly, there are only four Beatitudes whereas, in Matthew, there were nine (Matt. 5: 1-11). And then we read the following words: *'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.'* These words did not appear in Matthew's Gospel.

So it is clear that we must consider this Gospel as a new and different teaching from Jesus. And these 'woe to you...' statements are troubling because they seem to tell us that it is wrong to be rich, or to eat well, or to be happy, or to be highly respected by your peers.

But we are told from a very young age that, in this world, we must strive to achieve all of these goals. So have we been led astray by our forbears? In a word: 'No'. But Jesus tells us not to make the attainment of these goals our main priority in life. Otherwise, it will not be possible to carry out Jesus' primary commandment to: *'Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind'*.

If we are single-minded in the pursuit of wealth, position, happiness, and plenty, it may be because, deep down, some of us believe that our life on earth is all there is. We think that we must make this life the best it can be since there is nothing to look forward to after we die. If we believe this, then Paul tells us that we are to be pitied. He says that if we don't believe in the resurrection, then our faith is futile. We cannot call ourselves Christians.

St. John of the Cross espoused detachment from those things that we may pursue with total dedication. He knew that it was impossible to avoid material things while we live in the world, but he said the following: *'The doctrine of total detachment does not require that everyone abandon all things materially, but that each one, in whatever surroundings he finds himself, know how to keep his heart free from all attachment'*.

So, whether we have a lot or little, let us detach ourselves from material things and put our trust in God. Let us take to heart the words of Jeremiah:

*Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
That person shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.*