

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - year C 2006 - Luke 6:17, 20-26

1. They seem to come quite regularly now;
  - a. Reports that America's children do not measure up
    - i. Mentally, they say, our kids lack the drive, the interest and the ability of the children in France, Germany and of course, China.
    - ii. Physically, they say, our kids are couch potatoes.
  - b. Responses to these reports come regularly as well.
    - i. Parents blame the teachers; teachers blame the parents
    - ii. Teachers' unions blame the government's *No Child Left Behind* program
    - iii. The Government blames the teachers' unions for coddling poorly performing teachers.
2. In the midst of all this bickering of course,
3. the one opinion you never hear is that of the children.
  - i. But that is not that surprising;
  - b. for it is hard to have an opinion when you are struggling through the day
    - i. loaded down with books and homework,
      - (1) trying to live up to the standards of government,
      - (2) the demands of teachers
      - (3) and the expectations of parents.
4. Indeed you don't have to be a student to experience this;
  - a. From the wife or husband who worries about their looks, to the highest officers in a corporation; we are always looking over our shoulder, checking our backs, afraid that there is someone who is bigger, brighter, better than we are.
    - i. And that we do not measure up.
5. But suppose for a moment, that the standards were the problem?
  - a. Suppose that all you had to do was be smarter than, oh say, a mouse?
6. That is the premise of the 1968 movie *Charly*, starring Cliff Robertson.
  - a. Charly is a mentally handicapped young man who works at a bakery;
  - b. Yet cannot live up to the expectations
    - i. of his bosses, his coworkers and friends,
  - c. Charly tries; he goes to school and struggles to better himself;
    - i. but he simply cannot measure up.
7. At school he meets a teacher
  - a. who enrolls him in a program meant to boost intelligence.
  - b. Charly undergoes an operation, and afterwards,
  - c. his intelligence is measured against that of Algernon,
    - (1) a mouse whose intelligence has been similarly altered.
    - ii. Every day they are tested. Every day, the mouse wins.
    - iii. Charly is about to give up when one day, he beats the mouse!
8. This one achievement seems to be the key to unlocking Charly's potential;
  - a. He quickly masters all the tasks in the bakery,
    - i. to the point where the other workers grow worried that they do not measure up, and of course then have Charly fired.
  - b. But no matter; Charly enrolls full time in the university
    - i. and soon is studying mathematics, philosophy and science.

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9. If the movie ended there, its message would be clear:
  - a. all we have to do is find the right technique, the right formula, the right trick,
  - b. and we could be whatever we want to be;
    - i. smarter, more beautiful, better;
  - c. we could fulfill our teachers' expectations, our bosses expectations
    - i. OUR expectations.
    - ii. We would finally measure up.
10. And maybe that is where the movie would end, were it made nowadays.
  - a. But towards the end of the movie we see Charly, eating at a restaurant,
    - i. when suddenly there is a huge CRASH.
  - b. A busboy has dropped a tray of dishes on the floor in the middle off the room;
    - i. all around him the people are mocking and laughing at the busboy,
      - (1) who is clearly mentally handicapped.
  - c. Charly could have joined in with them;
    - i. But he doesn't; he gets up, goes over, and alone among all the diners he helps the busboy clean up his mess.
  - d. because he sees something in this busboy the others do not;
    - i. but should; Charly sees himself in him.
11. At this point you probably think you have stumbled in
  - a. on a taping of *Roger Ebert* or some other movie critic program,
  - b. rather than the celebration of Sunday mass at St. Teresa's,
  - c. and you are wondering why I have not even mentioned the Sunday readings;
12. Well I am about to; for you see; I hate this Sunday's reading.
  - a. Yes, I admit it. I hate the beatitudes;
  - b. especially the version we hear this morning in the Gospel of Luke with its perfectly balanced list of four "blessed are you"s and four "woe to you"s
13. Now I don't hate them because of what they are in themselves
  - a. I hate them because of what they do to us. I hate
    - i. How they make us look into our wallets,
      - (1) our bank accounts and our refrigerators.
    - ii. How they makes us feel guilty when we are having a good time,
      - (1) and encourage long faces and wallowing in sadness.
    - iii. How they make us think that if only I do A, B and C,
      - (1) and avoid D, E, and especially F(Whatever THAT is)
      - (2) I will be . . . what, blessed? Saved? Perhaps,
      - (3) but certainly not happy,
      - (4) which is the meaning of the Greek word we translate as *blessed*.
  - b. I hate how these beatitudes become the Church's version of *No Child Left Behind*;
    - i. Just do these things and you will measure up to God.
14. And yet there is a problem with that, isn't there? For if being saved, blessed, happy meant following the rules then in the words of St. Paul in today's second reading, our faith in Christ is in vain. We wouldn't need Christ, blessing and cursing us with the rules; all we would need is the rules.
15. But then maybe the real problem is us;

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- a. We who live in a world ruled by expectations.
  - i. Expectations which affect everything; including the way we read the bible
- 16. For Jesus isn't offering expectations;
  - a. (And this, by the way is why I do not hate the beatitudes)
- 17. He is changing them;
  - a. He is not telling us how live up to God's expectations and thus be blessed,
  - b. he is telling us where to find God, right here, in the midst of our less than perfect lives; because it is right here and now that we are blessed.
- 18. For in a world where the rich and the well fed who are happy and acclaimed,
  - a. Because they have made it; just like Charly did,
- 19. Jesus is warning them that those advantages bring with them responsibilities.
  - a. Not the least of which to see those who are poor and hungry,
    - i. weep and are hated,
  - b. not as failures to be rejected, but as persons just like we are
  - c. Persons who are cherished and loved by God just like we are;
  - d. and thus persons who are to be cherished and loved by us - just like Charly did.
- 20. It is tempting to see the movie *Charly* as example of our society's deepest belief;
  - a. that with enough work we can do anything we want, all by ourselves.
  - b. It is tempting to see the beatitudes that way too;
    - i. That wit enough effort we can do anything we want; even bless ourselves.
- 21. But rather than allow this dream to influence our reading of scripture;
  - a. This morning let the scriptures influence your reading of society.
  - b. Because a world where we see ourselves, limited and broken, in others,
    - i. isn't a world that has failed according to God;
    - ii. it's a world filled with God, because it's a world that needs God;
      - (1) and every time we show charity to the hungry,
        - (a) and are generous to the poor
      - (2) every time we support those who are weak
        - (a) and fight for the rights of all those who are hated.
  - c. We see something in these people not unlike what Charly saw;
    - i. We see Christ, who is God become one of us, in these people
    - ii. And when we serve them, we serve him -
      - (1) not to make us better, but to make them better.
    - iii. And through our service,
      - (1) God makes the world better.
- 22. No wonder Jesus says and we sing - Rejoice and be glad!
  - a. Because in that,
    - i. yours is not just some merit badge, promotion or grade A on a report card.
    - ii. Yours is the kingdom of God.