

LENT 2017 – Day 11 – March 16th

Today also we journey with our friend Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 17:5

This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord."

He is saying if you depend on human beings you're in for great disappointment.

If you depend on people you're in for a great problem. It's a scriptural theme and even Jesus picked the same thing up. But if you have no God then you will only have people and that is the sadness of life. For many people, there's only people to depend on and no God. Jeremiah says that if you depend on people, you're going to get into a problem sooner or later.

That doesn't mean you withdraw from people, but you simply change the foundation of your life to something else.

Jeremiah 17:6

He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no-one lives.

You will walk in dryness. "Today, this person let me down; today, that person let me down." One day a person was saying how this person's best friend was going through a crisis and she felt so bad for her and said, "You come home and stay with me - I'll support you through the crisis." Then, one day, two weeks later, she was coming from her room to the dining room and she heard the best friend and the husband talking and both of them were running her down. They had developed a healthy partnership. She says she was so upset and didn't know what to do that she took a glass and dashed it on the ground.

This is human life. We are holding on to human beings, and when they change, everything breaks up.

But there is an alternative and that is what the reading is telling us:

Jeremiah 17:7

But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him.

You can't not have a disconnection with God for six days of the week and try to trust Him on the seventh day - **nothing is going to happen.**

You're talking to all and sundry for the six days and when someone hurts you and you want to trust in the Lord, nothing will happen. You need to grow so that the relationship with God is more real than the relationships you have with people on a daily basis.

- That's why we need a spiritual life,
- we need consistent prayer life,
- we need the discipline of sitting at the feet of Jesus.

In the night, before you go to sleep, when you put your mind at rest by connecting with God, you clean up your conscience and set it up and worship the Lord and you're connected and you're at rest because He is watching over you - your entire sleep patterns and your rest and everything changes because you're secure.

But if you just go to sleep, you're going to sleep with so many unresolved issues. Or else we are going to sleep with the television programme running in your mind. Often we find that we are disturbed within. There is such a peace and rest that comes to life when you connect to God. Then when you get up in the morning - you reconnect with God. It really doesn't matter what happens around you after that, because you have a stronger connection with the Lord.

That doesn't come to people who don't pay the price. The price is discipline and commitment to prayer life. If you do that, it changes everything.

Some of us who are more disturbed than others have the good fortune that deep inside we know that without Him we cannot exist. "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Because of that, you have no illusions about yourself. You know that without Him you're gone, so you keep seeking Him with your whole life. Then God begins to use you in a greater way than how normal people would be used. People think it's your holiness or cleverness or goodness. We also get trapped in that. But in actual fact, it is the result of this connection with God. The weakest and the most sinful can have that connection. That is the beautiful thing about this journey. We are first dealing with a Saviour who later becomes Lord. Once He becomes Lord and begins to rule your life, He becomes lover and then becomes intimate. It is a journey into the heart of God and many people don't have that. God is a stranger they are crying out to.

Jeremiah 17:8

He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream...

This imagery is given by psalm 1 as well and Jesus in the imagery of the house that is built with the foundation. It is a biblical truth and it says: If you build a spiritual life, you're establishing your life in a lot of peace and happiness. If you don't, you're into a storm.

Jeremiah 17:8 continued

...It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in the year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

It doesn't promise that you will not have a drought, it isn't saying that you won't have heat. What it is saying is that you will be sustained through it because you're connected to God through your spiritual journey. You don't have to look within yourself for character to face the challenge, you don't have to look within yourself for resources - you get it from God.

The gospel of today is from *Luke 16:19-31*. This is the parable that Jesus spoke about the rich man and the beggar. We know that the beggar's name is Lazarus. It is the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. This rich man, though he was rich, he was actually poor. He had no space inside him to think about anybody else. I can guarantee you that I've met many rich people like that. They are rich but they

are poor because what they have is not enough. They are always thinking of getting more and they are afraid that someone will take what they have. So they are actually poor.

A person was telling me that there was this committee of some of the richest people and they suggested that they would go to a particular country for a conference. This person was telling me about a certain person who is one of the richest people in our country. This rich person has asked, "Who will pay for my ticket?" He can buy the plane itself but he wants to know who will pay for the ticket. Their mentality is poor.

There are so many poor people whose mentality is rich. They are generous, they can think about others, they care, they stand in the gap and they support them through the crisis. But others can't do it because they are poor.

We have a new definition of rich and poor. The poor person is the one who can't come out of their preoccupation with themselves. The famous Charles Dickens character Scrooge, couldn't enjoy Christmas because though he was rich he was actually poor. He couldn't give anything to anybody, he couldn't share anything - and he was really poor. Ultimately someone who had nothing teaches him how to find the riches of life. Rich and poor is not about how much money you have in the bank - it is about if you're preoccupied with yourself. We can be spiritually poor like that.

I struggle with it myself. I offer support for people on a general base, but when it comes to helping people on a personal level, I find I have a resistance that comes from inside. I don't want to give that time. It's very selfish and I know, but it comes from deep inside of me. I want that space, I want to be by myself, I want to spend that time within myself. I try to pass the thing on to someone else as much as I can. It has helped the movement to grow in one way, because people aren't always looking for me. They have now resigned themselves to thinking, "This guy is unapproachable - you can't find a time to talk to him." So they have found other people to talk to and it works. But in my own heart I have this issue. If anyone wants time from me, immediately I have a barrier that comes up. You begin to realize that it's coming from our woundedness. You don't want to give yourself to that extent. Then we are actually poor.

I remember one of you who are here now, about 5 years ago, we had a woman who was possessed by a demon and she was so strong and she was assaulting people and kicking people. We had never met anyone like that, and one of you took her home and kept her for over a month and she was completely redeemed. That is being rich. You are rich enough to allow people in to your space. Being poor is to close the door and say, "I don't want to get involved, I don't want to go through the trouble of becoming connected with somebody else's problem." That is the challenge we have. We keep our spaces and we work it out.

The next thing I want to show you is the argument for life after death. The Protestant version is that when you die you go to sleep and you come back on the last day. But look at the very parable that Jesus has spoken. In this parable, Jesus is convinced that people continue to live after they die. How do you know? He says that Abraham is in heaven and this man has gone down to Hades. The man wants him to send someone to his relations on earth so that they may be warned that they should prepare for eternity.

In other words, the very parable shows us that Jesus believed that people continued to live after death. It's a good base for reflection and to share with people, because otherwise, arguments are built to attack something in the church. Of course there was excesses of people being manipulated to put money in order that they pray for souls - so that became like a big business. Some banks in Europe bought over religious shrines in the middle centuries and said, "We will give you so much of money, but the collection you get from this place will be taken by the banks." So the bank ran advertising campaigns and made sure people understood that if you put money into this place your loved ones are jumping to heaven.

Those excesses made Protestants build this argument that life doesn't continue after you die. So they have thrown the baby with the bath water.

We will continue to live after we die and that is for sure. We minister to people and we find out that people who are dead continue to live even in this environment in many places. Don't ask me why they haven't gone to purgatory or somewhere else; but there are people stuck in this dimension. Many people who they say is an evil spirit is actually not an evil spirit but dead people trapped in this dimension. Somebody came and said at Mabole, "If you don't believe me, the movement of that thing was caught on the CCTV of the house." He is a doctor who came and told me in Mabole. People who should have been prepared for life after death were totally unprepared. So they have no desire, no thirst and no vision for the next life. All they have is this one - so they can't leave this and go. Life exists after we die and every time we have a connection with the Lord and spend time with Him, our hearts are being prepared for this.

I'd like to finish today with this connection of the poor with our spiritual journey, given in the Magnificat.

The theme is: *The gift of the poor man.*

Let us concern ourselves with those who lack everything, those of whom no one thinks. Let us be the friends of those who have no friends. This was said by Charles de Foucauld, the founder of the Focolare movement in the church that is powerful all over the world. This is his vision of discovering people who have nothing.

For some people the encounter with the poor serves as a prelude to the contemplative life. That is like the stepping stone. You start the inner journey by actually ministering to poor people. This need not be so, but often seems to be the case. We are likely to find that genuine contemplatives, even those now in cloisters or monasteries, have sought real contact with the poorest of the poor at some stage in their spiritual life.

What does that mean? The moment your love affair with yourself stops, or your involvement with your own self stops, or your admiration for your own self stops - then you notice the need and the struggles of other people. Many of us haven't yet come to that place. The journey into spirituality has to find such a place. Here it is. Sometimes this journey exposes you because suddenly you realize you're nice and helpful to people who are capable of either helping you or hurting you. But if the people are at your mercy, a lot of people become merciless. It is amazing how good people are harsh and merciless to the helpless, because they aren't afraid of them anymore. That's how people become wicked towards the helpless.

It can happen inside our own hearts as well. We are challenged. When you notice that, that means you have come out of yourself for a few moments. That's why the spiritual journey is connected to this. So thank God for the church and for the contemplatives who have spent years finding these secrets and giving it to us - so that without much effort we can find it for ourselves.