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We are aware of the cultural addictions controlling us: racism, sexism, elitism, clericalism, nationalism, just to name only some. These social arrangements live within our addictive institutions. They deny God’s image in human beings because they are not part of those in power. These cultural addictions also control everything as obstacles to earth’s resources, exploited through consumerism and materialism, economic imperialism and militarism. This way of operating creates domination, oppression and abuses; denies resources from being shared more equitably. Ideology secures these “isms;” they seduce the heart. These are *“the sins of the world,”* shredding the fabric of our nation. We may not have created some of this but are responsible to some degree. This calls for conversion. Conversion demands that we let go of their power over us, and come under the power of the reign of God.

St Luke’s version of four Beatitudes and four Woes are presented today. The context in which Jesus pronounces the Beatitudes is that Jesus is instructing the disciples and the large crowd. Burdened and afflicted, these people have come from far and near to receive the Lord’s healing power. The implication is that the disciples, and subsequently the people, by adopting the values enshrined in the Beatitudes, are to become themselves instruments of hope and healing for troubled humanity.

The pattern that God seems to employ is to gather people into community, *“fraternitas,”* living the Gospel in the world, reading the reality of these alienations, and how they could take authority over them with the power of God’s word within themselves. In the biblical tradition, being *“blessed”* does not speak of a moral attitude to be adopted. Rather, in the tradition of our ancestors in the faith, the declaration of a person as *“blessed”* is in view of a coming action of God. Our first reading from Jeremiah provides a background for outcomes—positive and negative, of being blessed or cursed—whether or not one puts one’s trust in God.

However, St Luke’s Beatitudes are highly provocative. They constitute and hold together two concepts that clash and are at odds with one another. It is outrageous to congratulate the poor on being poor, the hungry on being hungry, the weeping and the reviled on being in the condition they are in. In the same vein, it is foolish to declared unfortunate the wealthy, the well-fed, the laughing, and those who enjoy a good reputation. Other things being equal, these states are perfectly desirable.

But with the Lord Jesus other things are not equal at all. The Beatitudes and the Woes only make sense in the light of the coming reversal of fortune brought about by God. It’s a prominent theme in Luke’s theology of salvation.

The reversal of the social order is God’s desire to overturn unjust social structures. Jesus comes on the side of the poor calling for a radical transformation of society where the oppressed are liberated and the rich are challenged. Social justice in the Beatitudes has a clear anticipation in Mary’s Magnificat: *“He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises up the lowly. He fills the starving with good things, and sends the rich away empty.”* This reveals the Kingdom of God as a real, transformative force in the world that brings justice and does away with systems of inequality. The poor are not just recipients of future blessings but agents of change in God’s Kingdom.

