

## SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: BLESSED ARE THEY WHO HOPE IN THE LORD

Dear brothers and sisters,

Last Week we dwelt on the theme, the invitation of the Lord to you and me. We saw the huge difference trusting in the Lord made in the lives of Isaiah, Paul, Peter, James and John. For instance, in the lives of Peter James and the three fishermen from Galilee who became Apostles of the Lord there was an invasion of grace and miracles the moment they let our Lord into their boats. They put out into the deep at the request of the Lord and a miraculous catch of fish happened. This symbolized the fruitfulness of their missionary vocation and of all who put their trust in the Lord.

This Sunday we shall dwell on the theme, “The Blessing of Trusting in the Lord.” Our keynote verse is “Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD” (Jeremiah 17:17). Jeremiah through whom the Lord made this blessing known flourished and prophesied during the trying moment in Judah’s history. Born in 650 B.C, Jeremiah was a contemporary of the pious king Josiah. The later introduced many reforms that aimed at turning the heart of people to God. However, when Josiah died in 605 B.C the people of Judah abandoned all those wonderful reforms targeted toward helping them to trust in the Lord. Jeremiah saw in that defiance of his people the sealing of their doom. What a bad choice they made! They trusted in their own ingenuity rather than on the mighty power of the Lord. In the year 598 B.C their country was invaded and captured by Babylon and a few years later, in 587 BC Judah was deported to Babylon. Had Judah trusted in the Lord, she would have averted that tragedy. The Word of God clearly stated: “As you have abandoned me to serve foreign gods in your own land, so shall you serve foreigners in a land not your own” (Jeremiah 5:19).

In this life, sometimes, we feel overwhelmed or hemmed in by the circumstances of life. In such situations, we are tempted to listen to the voice of our fears, worries and inadequacies rather than the Lord. It could also happen, sometimes, that we are tempted by pride and a false sense of self-sufficiency that makes us think that we do not need God. In such moments of temptations, may we remember the word we read today: “Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit”(Jeremiah 17:7-8).The Lord emphasized this point in the Beatitudes and curses we read from the Gospel according to Luke,

Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man (Luke 6:20-23).

The poor, the hungry and the weeping are not necessarily those who do not have money or food or job but those who know that they need God. That is why in the Gospel according Matthew, the Word of God describes them as the poor in spirit. One who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is in the Lord is plugged into the love that never ends and never disappoints. Do we always feel the grandeur and indispensability of hope in the Lord as written in the Scripture “In hope we were saved” Romans 8:24). Do we have an example of this grandeur and beauty of hope in this life? We have a clear example of someone who lived this hope in

our time. The person is our sister and a saint from Africa Josephine Bakhita, canonized by Pope John Paul II.

She was born around 1869—she herself did not know the precise date—in Darfur in Sudan. At the age of nine, she was kidnapped by slave-traders, beaten till she bled, and sold five times in the slave-markets of Sudan. Eventually she found herself working as a slave for the mother and the wife of a general, and there she was flogged every day till she bled; as a result of this she bore 144 scars throughout her life. Finally, in 1882, she was bought by an Italian merchant for the Italian consul Callisto Legnani, who returned to Italy as the Mahdists advanced. Here, after the terrifying “masters” who had owned her up to that point, Bakhita came to know a totally different kind of “master”—in Venetian dialect, which she was now learning, she used the name “*paron*” for the living God, the God of Jesus Christ. Up to that time she had known only masters who despised and maltreated her, or at best considered her a useful slave. Now, however, she heard that there is a “*paron*” above all masters, the Lord of all lords, and that this Lord is good, goodness in person. She came to know that this Lord even knew her, that he had created her—that he actually loved her. She too was loved, and by none other than the supreme “*Paron*”, before whom all other masters are themselves no more than lowly servants. She was known and loved and she was awaited. What is more, this master had himself accepted the destiny of being flogged and now he was waiting for her “at the Father's right hand”. Now she had “hope” —no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: “I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.” Through the knowledge of this hope she was “redeemed”, no longer a slave, but a free child of God. On 9 January 1890, she was baptized and confirmed and received her first Holy Communion from the hands of the Patriarch of Venice. On 8 December 1896, in Verona, she took her vows in the Congregation of the Canossian Sisters and from that time onwards, her life took a new dimensions of joy (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi Summus* 1).

In conclusion, may we remind ourselves what the Lord said to his people of old. “This day...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deutonomy 30:19-20).

Is there another example of a human being that hoped in the Lord as the word of God asked of us? Yes, we find this in all the saints and especially in Mary, the Mother of the Lord.

She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives. Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God's promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises. Mary is a woman of faith: “Blessed are you who believed”, Elizabeth says to her (cf. *Lk* 1:45, Benedict XVI, *Deus est Caritas* 42).

Borrowing a leaf from the Pope emeritus, let us pray.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, you have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son – the Son of God. You abandoned yourself completely to God's call and thus became a well-spring of the goodness which flows forth from him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to him. Teach us to know and to love him, so that we too can become capable of true love and be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world ( *Ibidem*).

Amen, we too can abandon ourselves to God's invitation to trust him and blessings will overflow in our lives.