

Homily for the 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Cycle C

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

February 16, 2025

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As we continue our celebration of this Jubilee year, with the theme of “Pilgrims of Hope,” today’s Gospel reading gives us a way of becoming a pilgrim of hope. Saint Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain” (6:17-49) is similar to Saint Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount.” Unlike Matthew’s setting for his sermon on a mountain, Luke shows Jesus close to the crowds he addresses. Thus the disciples and a large number of people representing Jews and gentiles are located on level ground with Jesus.

Luke begins his account with a series of four beatitudes. These are wisdom forms that express a combination of happiness, being fortunate, and being blessed. The surprising element in each beatitude, however, highlights some kind of misery: poverty, hunger, weeping, hate, exclusion, impoverishment and denunciation. The reason why those experiencing such miseries are blessed is that the misery will ultimately be transformed into blessing. Future blessings will far outweigh current hardships.

A day is coming when God will reverse the fortunes of those believers who have remained faithful during current distress. The subject matter of this misery is real poverty, hunger, and harsh social conditions. But there is more to it than that. There is also the spiritual dimension which points to hope for the future.

These blessings are followed by a series of woes, directed to those who are satisfied with the pleasures of this world. These blessings and woes are aimed at those people who live their lives either in harmony or out of harmony with the rule of God. Their purpose is to proclaim that God does indeed reward the faithful with the graces of His heavenly Kingdom.

After my homily this morning we will have the baptism of four children in the Timoney family. God has blessed three of the Timoney siblings with the birth of four children around the same time, including a set of twins. I was one of Conner Timoney's hockey coaches at Sacred Heart-Griffin High School, so maybe we have a future hockey player, too!

A key part of the baptismal liturgy is the baptismal promises that the parents and godparents make on behalf of the babies to be baptized. The baptismal promises are taken from the Creed that summarizes the essential elements of our Catholic faith into which they will be baptized.

As we continue our reflections on the Nicene Creed during this year marking the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, previously we looked in a general way at the first two words, “I believe,” and what it means to believe in something or someone. Today we will look more specifically at the first full statement of the Nicene Creed, “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.” There is a lot packed into that brief statement.

First, we focus on the word “one.” Many ancient religions were polytheistic, that is, they believed in multiple gods. The Greeks and Romans were generally not atheists, but believed in various gods who provided for their different purposes and interests. For example, the king of the gods was known by the Greek name Zeus and the Roman name Jupiter. In fact, the planets of our solar system bear the names of Roman mythology: Mercury (messenger of the gods), Venus (goddess of love), Mars (god of war), Saturn (god of agriculture), Uranus (god of the sky), and Pluto (god of the underworld). The early Christian martyrs were killed because they refused to offer sacrifice to the gods, especially the Roman Emperor, who was considered a god.

The religion of the Jews in the Old Testament and the Christians in the New Testament is monotheistic, that is, believing in one God. Although our contemporary culture does not have a formal system of pagan gods, it might well be said that many people have their own secular gods in the sense of priorities where they put their time and attention, such as sports, entertainment, work, money, power, pleasure, etc. To believe in one God means to make the one true God more important than anyone or anything else in our lives. The fourth declaration of our Fourth Diocesan Synod says, "To be a disciple means to accept Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior. Disciples are those who 'make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves.' Catholic discipleship refers to a committed approach to living a Christian life within the Catholic Church."

Although Christians believe that God is a Trinity of Three Persons – Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit – there is only one God. Jesus introduced referring to the first Person of the Blessed Trinity as "Our Father" when He taught the disciples how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4). When we were baptized, we became adopted sons and daughters of God the Father and brothers and sisters in Christ.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Believing in God, the only One, and loving him with all our being has enormous consequences for our whole life. It means coming to know God’s greatness and majesty. ... It means living in thanksgiving: if God is the only One, everything we are and have comes from him. ... It means knowing the unity and true dignity of all men: everyone is made in the image and likeness of God. It means making good use of created things. ... It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity” (CCC, nn. 222-227).

We profess our belief that God is the “maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.” To believe in God as Creator of all things is not opposed to science and to the rightful autonomy of the sciences. As the Second Vatican Council pointed out in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, “If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. ... Therefore, if

methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. ... But if the expression, the independence of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that [we] can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 36).

Our belief in God's creation encompasses things seen and unseen. There are invisible realities that are quite real even though we cannot see them, such as the air we breathe, but also metaphysical realities, including angels, demons, our souls, and the virtues, such as faith, hope and love, and the fact that there is one Truth, not your truth and my truth. The greatest expression of an invisible reality is the Eucharist. Although physical eyesight is not capable of seeing the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, our eyes of faith perceive and believe that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith in God as the Creator of the visible and invisible realities of the universe is strengthened when we put our trust in God's grace. May God give us this grace. Amen.