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## Father Cantalamessa on the Rich-Poor Divide

### Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on Sunday's Readings

ROME, FEB. 9, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from this Sunday's liturgy.

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Blessed are you who are poor! Woe to you who are rich!

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20; Luke 6:17,20-26

The passage of the Gospel for this Sunday, which is on the beatitudes, provides us with an occasion to verify some things that we said two Sundays ago about the historical nature of the Gospels. We said then that in referring to Jesus' words, each of the four Evangelists, without betraying the fundamental meaning, developed one aspect or another of what Jesus said, adapting it to the needs of the community for whom they wrote.

While Matthew reports Eight Beatitudes pronounced by Jesus, Luke reports only four. In compensation, however, Luke reinforces the Four Beatitudes, opposing a corresponding malediction to each, introduced by a "woe."

Also, while Matthew's discourse is indirect: "Blessed are the poor"; Luke's is indirect: "Blessed are you who are poor!" Matthew puts the accent on spiritual poverty -- "the poor in spirit" -- and Luke puts it on material poverty.

But, as is plain, these are details that do not change in the least the substance of things. Both of the two Evangelists, with his particular way of reporting Jesus' teaching, sheds light on a new dimension which would have otherwise remained in shadow. Luke's list of the beatitudes is not as complete, but he perfectly grasps the basic meaning.

When we speak of the beatitudes, our thoughts go immediately to the first one: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours." But in reality, the horizon is much larger.

Here Jesus is outlining two ways to understand life: either "for the kingdom of God" or "for one's own consolation." That is, life is either exclusively in function of this earthly life, or also in function of eternal life.

This is what Luke's account draws attention to: "Blessed are you -- Woe to you": "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.... Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation."

Two categories, two worlds. The poor, the hungry, those who weep and those who are persecuted and banished because of the Gospel, belong to the category of the blessed. The rich, the satiated, those who laugh now and those who are praised by all, belong to the category of the unfortunate.

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Jesus does not simply canonize all the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and the persecuted, just as he does not simply demonize all the rich, the satiated, those who laugh and are praised. The distinction is deeper; it has to do with knowing what we put our trust in, on what sort of foundation we are building the house of our life, whether it is on that which will pass away, or on that which will not pass away.

The passage from today's Gospel is truly a double-edged sword: It separates, traces, two diametrically opposed destinies. It is like the prime meridian which divides east and west.

But, fortunately, there is an essential difference. The prime meridian is fixed: The lands that are in the east cannot pass to the west, just as the equator which divides the poverty of the global south from the rich, opulent north is fixed.

The line that divides the blessed and the unfortunate in our Gospel is not like this; it is a mobile barrier. Not only can one pass from one side to the other, but this whole passage of the Gospel was intended by Jesus as an invitation to pass from one sphere to the other.

He invites us not to become poor, but to become rich! "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours!" The poor possess a kingdom and they have it right now! Those who decide to enter this kingdom are from now on sons of God, free, brothers, full of hope and immortality. Who would not want to be poor in this way?

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