

# Epiphany 6 Yc 25 Homily

Would you be seated please. In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I've called the theme of this sermon Global Awareness and Spiritual Blessings and Warnings. I'm not thirsty yet. Here I have a bottle of water.

A very ordinary, very common and increasingly precious commodity to many in our world. We have probably witnessed on the TV news thousands of people scrambling for bottles of water and for other food items in the devastation of the Gaza Strip after the tragic and indiscriminate bombings of that area by Israel. We have seen families and children scrambling for water in drought-stricken and war-torn parts of Africa.

We remember times of deep drought in Australia and the scenes of dead cattle around dry waterholes and of the isolated country towns and communities having to bring in tanker loads of water because their town water supplies have dried out or become polluted with salt. We can live with limited food for quite a while. But we cannot live without water.

In most religions throughout history and across our world, water is seen as a very important and foundational blessing of the gods. And in Judaism and Christianity, as a symbol of God's love and life-giving power. In Christianity, water is the baptismal symbol of incorporation into God's spiritual family.

Water is used to bless all sorts of items and gatherings, especially with holy water, which has been blessed and set apart for that particular use. Water is used at our Holy Communion to mix with the wine as a symbol of the water and blood that flowed from Jesus' side. You may have wondered why I add a little bit of water to the wine.

It's not to make it less alcoholic. It's in fact to symbolise the water and the blood that flowed from Jesus' side at his death. It's a reminder that Jesus' blood is the water of life, of our empowering.

One of the great problems when drought strikes is that things wilt and die. And so it is with spiritual drought. As we allow our spiritual reserves to dry up, or we are just too busy and forget, or we couldn't be bothered to regularly check on our spiritual water levels or monitor our parched soil landscapes, so our sense of harmony with God and our deeper connection with people and the world of nature are severely compromised.

Global warming, climate change, failing water resources, despite the floods that are going on all around us, excessive air pollution with CO2 and methane and other greenhouse gases, and the ongoing destruction of forests and natural habitat are all very challenging, controversial and significant issues of our time. All have at their core a dislocation, a dishonour and disharmony of our physical and spiritual integration with the way we live in and use and so often abuse our environment. Water is a powerful symbol of our world's ongoing environmental crisis.

We either have too little or we have too much. And also, as we have already shared, a powerful symbol of our redemption in Christ and God's richest blessing. In the Gospel reading today, Jesus gives one of his most famous and even controversial teaching sessions.

This teaching session is given to a huge, what we might call spiritually thirsty crowd that has gathered to hear his words of wisdom. And there are actually two slightly different narratives of this famous teaching passage. In the more popular and well-known version in Matthew's Gospel, it is called the Sermon on the Mount.

In today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus has come down from the mountainside to a flatter place and it is usually called the Sermon on the Plain. The actual geographical detail of the place is of little importance really. The content of what Jesus says is far more important and of great spiritual significance.

Now if you listen closely to the introduction to that Lukean reading, he came down from a higher place and it says, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, the coast of Tyre and Sidon. Did that surprise you a little? How many disciples did Jesus have? We all say twelve. No, no, no.

There's a great crowd of his disciples. He had twelve, what we call apostles. We usually call them disciples.

But there were many, many more students, if you like, followers of what Jesus was saying. A great crowd of disciples and a great crowd of others. So it was a big crowd of people who were sort of committed to hearing what Jesus had to say and a lot of others who were perhaps more interested in his healing or just that it was exciting being in a big crowd.

We all know what happens with big crowds sometimes. And as I said, the content of what Jesus says is far more important and of great spiritual significance than where it happened. The sermon begins with what has traditionally been called the Beatitudes, or the blessings, if you like.

Then follows a shorter series of what are so much called curses, but declarations of woe to those who don't get it right, who don't foster a good lifestyle, who make life choices that result in less than happy and healthy living, both for the body and the soul. And if you note it on the front of the pew sheet, there is a picture of a wrong way sign. And Jan Mazurka has assured me that that was chosen so that people don't go down the wrong way.

They choose the blessings rather than the woes, if you like. And perhaps you may have noticed as I was reading the Gospel that I presented the blessings and then I presented the woes in a fairly gentle voice. I've heard them done.

**Woe to you!** Sorry if I surprised you out of your pews, but I've heard that done. I don't think that's what Jesus would have done. He would have said that with compassion.

Woe to you who are going the wrong way. It doesn't work. Do you think that would be better? I do.

I'm more likely to listen than to someone who's shouting in my face. I don't think that was Jesus' style. So they're not curses.

They're woes. They're sadnesses. And we will in this address make some links between spiritually enlightening water and lifestyle choices to reflect on what Jesus says in this powerful sermon and especially on the woes, the wrong ways.

Jesus says, Woe to you who are rich now, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

In Australia we are and have been very rich in resources and many, but not all, have received much consolation financially and materially from such natural wealth. But we have not been wise and prudent in our future planning of our dwindling resources and in our future proofing of water resources nor in our response to the global environmental effects of what we produce. We have been so full and now we are facing the prospects of being somewhat thirsty and hungry for ample water and power and food and forestry resources.

We perhaps have been laughing in our general standard of living in a relatively peace-filled Australia. It always amazes me a little, there is a lot of anger, but when you do go and see those news reports on Gaza for instance or on Ukraine or somewhere else that people can still laugh and smile amidst all the devastation. We do, as Australians, need to reassess and perhaps to mourn and weep that we weren't better stewards of the Murray-Darling River Basin, of our natural, wonderful forests and we historically participated in the destruction of millions of acres of good, productive grasslands by overstocking and overgrazing and by the catastrophic introduction of feral species like rabbits and foxes and cane toads and feral cats and prickly pear and the like.

When applied to our specific situation, we can perhaps see that Jesus' words do have a very profound and insightful connection to our everyday and modern realities. So we do have a better handle on our priorities and to live better and more in harmony with our world and with God's purposes. Jesus says that we need to get the blessings or beatitudes right in our lives and in some way that image on the front of the pew sheet, wrong way, is when we start to look at the right way.

We start to see where the blessings lie. Lest are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. In other words for us, lest are we, when we choose to live less materialistic, a less throw-away society of goods that are still useful and good.

Thank you for the opportunity shops. And less thoughtlessly abusive of ecological and environmental balances. For then we will have a healthier, more equitable community and world we live in and the kingdom of God, that is God's blessing and creation, will truly be ours to partake in with everyone.

The kingdom of God is ours. Lest are you when you are hungry now, for you will be filled. In other words, lest are we when we choose to limit our excessive use of resources, when we choose to go on a diet from overabundance and self-indulgence, when we choose to give up or limit our fast food consumption or our obsessive fashion and latest gadgetry spending springs and our overuse of alcohol and cigarettes and recreational drug use, of our constant casting off of clothing and household goods for something we think is better, that creates little internal happiness.

So lest are we when we choose to go a bit hungry from what we don't really need for our health and well-being. Lest are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Not about people dying so much.

In other words, help us to be more socially concerned and emotionally energised by issues of clear injustice and inequity and environmental irresponsibility and the appalling rise of, for me, far-right ideologies and the inevitable taking away of the rights of minorities and the oppressed and the rise of dictatorships which are certainly becoming far more common now. Lest are you who weep now. Now, I don't know about you, but I often find myself weeping spiritually and even almost physically for much that is reported in our daily news reports of violence and abuse and suffering and of psychopathic and unfettered leadership that appalls my spirit.

Lest are you who weep now. And I sometimes think, yeah, I've fallen there. For all sorts of reasons.

Jesus was focused on constructive, healthful, spiritually empowered living that always observed the social and economic needs of others. The Sermon on the Mount, or the Plain, was all about that sort of living and gives us very strong clues as to how best to adapt our lives to enable the fulfilment and restoration of God's desired blessings for ourselves and for the world in general. I truly hope you have a beatitude-filled year of 2025 ahead.

And may the symbol of bottled water be uncapped in your lives and the spiritual river of God's holy blessing be constantly flowing within and washing over you. In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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