

Choosing God will bear fruits

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 6:17, 20-26; (R1) Jeremiah 17:5-8; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20.

Throughout the prophets' books, we find scattered sayings that do not seem related to what goes before or after. These various sayings were often put together after the prophets died.

Sunday's first reading is a good example of such unattached sayings. They may have been directed to King Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.) "whose heart turns away from the Lord" (R1).

Jeremiah is trying to persuade his countrymen to be faithful to God. God is like a fountain of living water. Life is good and fruitful with Him, but without Him it is evil and barren. The Bible generally views good and evil in terms of results.

Good brings blessedness and happiness; evil brings a curse and unhappiness. The good are like the fruitful tree planted near the running water. The bad are like a barren bush in the desert or like chaff

which the wind drives away.

The Gospel is a similar study in contrasts, with its blessings and woes. While Matthew has eight beatitudes, Luke has four (along with the four beatitudes, however, Luke has four woes). In Matthew, Jesus utters His beatitudes on a mountain, symbolizing Mt. Sinai. He gives them on a level stretch in Luke, for to Luke the mountain is a place for prayer.

When Jesus came down from the mountain, where He had spent the night in prayer, He speaks to all — including the Jews and Gentiles. He spoke to His disciples in particular ("raising his eyes to his disciples.")

Jesus calls blessed those whom the world calls unfortunate: the poor, hungry and sad, as well as those who will be hated because they belong to Him. And He describes as woeful those the world calls blest: the rich, sated, prosperous and famous.

What Jesus is saying is that those who will be true to His words will suffer, such as the poor and hungry. Whereas those who are false to His words will prosper, such as those

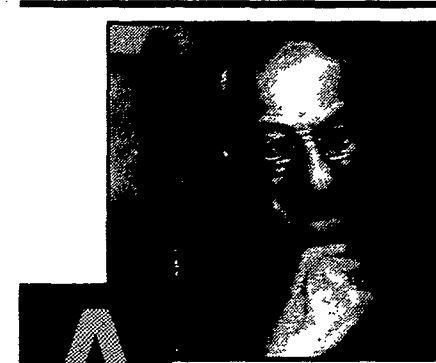
who have all of the world's goods.

Yet the sufferers will be spiritually rich and fruitful, such as the tree by running water, and the prosperous will be spiritually barren, like chaff driven away by the wind.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, was published in 1925. A bestseller at the time, the book propelled its author to fame and fortune. The main character, Jay Gatsby, is a wheeler-dealer who makes money wherever it can be made — regardless of how it is made. He sells stolen bonds to gullible investors and bootlegged liquor during prohibition. He is even rumored to be one of the men behind the World Series scandal in 1919.

Gatsby is consumed with becoming rich. The novel's sad element is that the reader sees how destitute Gatsby's dream becomes. His life is devoid of higher values. After he attains wealth, he and his friends think that having big parties and getting drunk are life's purposes. The reader sees through the sham.

The novel accurately reflects one component of American society in the roaring 1920s. The shallow char-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

acters have no deep roots. They are not like "a tree planted near the running water." They do not really prosper, but are "like chaff which the wind drives away." How tragic the end of billionaire Howard Hughes.

Before us all is the basic choice: God's will, or the pressures of the age; prosperous life, or mere futility; fruit or chaff.



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