

As you read the gospels, there are some theme's that seem to develop around Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry is all about healing, abundance, liberation, and joy. All of these topics are great. We all want healing. We want a life of abundance, we certainly don't want to live under oppression -- and joy, yeah, give me more and more joy.

Today, however, Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, sad, and expendable. Woe to you who are rich, full, happy, and popular." If we were to capture this whole sermon on the plain as succinctly as possible, that's it. We don't particularly like it. Frankly, we'd like to edit Jesus' sermon, wouldn't we. We don't see blessings in being poor, hungry, sad or expendable. These things don't bring us joy.

Jesus seems to be talking in opposite of how we normally think, and thinking in this manner reminds me of a prayer that Father Thomas Keating wrote. Father Thomas Keating was a contemplative and helped many people get through some very tough situations. Here is a prayer that he wrote that I am reminded of as I read the words of the Sermon on the Plain in Luke. It's called the "Welcoming Prayer" and you'll hear the word welcome quite often: the prayer: *I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know it's for my healing. I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions. I let go of my desire for power and control. I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval and pleasure. I let go of my desire for survival and security. I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself. I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within. Amen.*

What this prayer is intended to do is to live a balanced life. If am not going to know what it is like to have a full stomach unless I really know what being hungry is. I truly am having difficulty here. I can eat a really good meal and good portions of it. Yes, I might even feel full. But, no kidding at all, a half hour from the time I stopped eating I am hungry again. Seriously, I can't be hungry. It's impossible to eat like I did and be hungry again that quickly. It is impossible. What's my problem? Quite simply, it's that I have forgotten what it is really like to be hungry. Some how, my mind is convincing me that the feeling of my stomach not being completely full, means that I am hungry and that I need to eat. I have forgotten, truly forgotten, what it is like to be truly hungry. Is there a blessing to feeling hunger? For me, yes, I really think so. I know I would feel healthier if I did not eat so much. Feeling healthier would certainly be a blessing—I am quite sure.

This is what Jesus is saying, and it is what Father Thomas Keating is getting at in this prayer. We need to welcome all things into our lives, even those things that we feel like are bad for us. Welcoming everything and not pushing anything away gives us a full life, a truly full life, and sometimes simply knowing or understanding the opposite of something helps us understand even more fully what we think we like.

The welcoming prayer can be found on the web in lots of different sites if you want it. If you want it but can't find it, let me know. In the future sometime, sometime when something happens that you don't like or that is bothering you, say the prayer. "WELCOME" what you are experiencing. See if you can locate a spot in your body that is being affected by all of this. Many times, fear centers on the stomach, anger and frustration can locate itself in your face, around your eyes, the jaw. Every person is different. When you find the location, breathe into this area and then let go. Actually say the words, "I let go of my desire for security, affection, control and embrace this moment as it is."

Let us pray: Dear Lord, we don't always appreciate everything that comes our way in life. We become judgmental and push some things that come our way away. In so doing, we miss much of what is actually happening for our good in life. Help us to welcome everything, just like what you said in your sermon on the plain so that our lives may be as full as made them to be. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.