

“Blessed are you who are poor” (Lk 6,20)

Student’s preaching by Miguel González Cedeño

KSG Berlin - 13 February 2022 – Gospel: Lk 6:17, 20-26

In his sermon, Miguel reflects on the statement "Blessed are the poor". What does that mean when you're a student. A very personal approach to the Gospel.

Hello everyone, I am Miguel Gonzalez, 29 years old, Chemistry student at Freie Universität Berlin, and I am here to share this homily.

To use this Gospel reading for today's homily was not that intuitive for me at the beginning. Jesus is meeting with a multitude of people and telling them "Blessed are the poor, the hungry...", and they are indeed the poor and the hungry of Israel. I am a student, but thinking of myself as being poor would not be accurate, at least not as a student in Germany. And I am definitely not malnourished, just somewhat thin.

Nevertheless, the phrase "Blessed are the poor" did stuck with me on a more intellectual, even spiritual level, after I went over the reading a couple of times. My experience as a student has always put me in a contradictory position: I should always be prepared on whatever topic I need to engage with, and at the same time I know nothing about it. Having to live in that difficult reality started to condition my approach to studies. As I prepared for my master thesis this contradiction became more and more tolling, to the point I would not ask for help to solve some trivial situations since "I should already know this, I will figure this on my own". This was a very wrong way of thinking, indeed.

As the master thesis project advanced, though, I had some experiences that started to open my way of thinking. I joined the Zielteam, the coaching group for students in the KSG led by Karen. I had the chance to not only learn about strategies to deal with productivity and procrastination, but also to recognize that it is very normal to doubt yourself as a student. That one should acknowledge and be at peace with the fact that we know nothing and therefore ask for help. I also felt validated that it is okay to feel anxiety, wanting to quit even, because being a student can be very stressful. My stress manifested itself often in

social seclusion, not wanting to meet friends from the program, because I did not want to be exposed, even feeling like a fraud as a student.

Further conversations with my thesis advisor and the research group leader helped me to understand that we students do have the right to know nothing and that we have people in our midst who are very willing to share what they have learned. So, I started asking questions, even the ones I thought made me sound like I knew nothing about my project at all. This led to change, to progress, and my project started to take shape. My motivation grew, and whenever I shared a bit of what was going on in the Zielteam, with my partner or friends, they could notice my engagement. It must be stated that the progress was not completely steady, since every now and then I would find complications in my project, and could find myself stuck for days, the anxiety would come and make me not want to look at my project. As one might.

Eventually I would face my project. And ask again those questions, which became easier to communicate. Until the day of my master defense these ups and downs would become part of my experience. Then at some point I started to seek therapy on an individual basis. This became key to rounding up what I already learned in my sessions in the Zielteam. It is okay to ask questions. It is okay to feel anxiety about it. In academia we are subject to "peer-review", so that our colleagues can verify our work, sometimes to correct, but mainly to validate that we are doing things right. I accepted this subjection to be reviewed, to be corrected, and to be validated.

A few weeks ago, I managed to conclude my thesis project, but the most important lessons were not explicitly in my written document. "Blessed are you who are poor..., blessed are you who are weeping" says the Gospel. I can perhaps think of these lines like this: As soon as I recognize that I am poor in experience or knowledge, I can open myself to learn and grow. As soon as I recognize that I am "weeping" by experiencing anxiety, I can share my suffering and acknowledge that I am not alone. This is how I know that I am blessed.

Amen.