

## **Fourteenth Sunday of the Year July 09, 2017**

Zechariah 9:9-10; Romans 8:9.11-13; Matthew 11:25-30

The readings of today invite us to reflect on peace and consolation through the Word of God. This word reveals to us and shows us that God is all powerful and mighty and yet is always accessible. He is the God who is our creator and all surpassing, yet approaches us on intimate personal terms. He is our King, says Prophet Zechariah in the first reading, yet comes meekly riding on a placid donkey rather than on a prancing war horse. He is the new king whose arrival brings peace to the weary people. He has dominion is from sea to sea, and yet he is concerned personally of each one of us. That dominion is expressed in today's Gospel when Jesus says, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father." He reveals the Father to us, and so we are swept up, in the Holy Spirit, into the intimacy between Father and Son, as we ourselves become his sons and daughters in Jesus Christ. Jesus thanks the Father for granting the disciples the grace to grasp his teaching while keeping its meaning hidden from the so-called wise and intelligent people of the day. At the same time he says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light and hence we must come to him in order to receive rest from him. In the second reading Paul reminds us that the spirit of God dwells in us. Christ's dominion is His victory over death; our intimacy with Him is the fact that the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us and him who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies by His indwelling in us. Thus when we think spiritually, we are no longer burdened by the worldly ways because we are walking our living faith and hope with a spiritual heart. The Spirit enables us to overcome selfishness and live for God.

In the First Reading from the Book of Zechariah invites the Israelites for a sincere service to God. The prophet evokes God's protective care as he promises the coming of our King into Jerusalem, truly humble. He is coming riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. God always takes the initiative in the divine-human relationship. The scene is one of humility but also of peace indicating that peace is returned and the nation is free from the ravages of war. The people can now devote themselves to planting and harvesting. This is confirmed later in the words: "He will banish war chariots from Ephraim and war horses from Jerusalem; the bow of war will be banished." He will proclaim peace for the nations. He is a king of peace, not just in the sense of an external absence of violence but of a deep, inner peace, shalom. He restores the relationship between God and people which is evident from the fact that God addresses Jerusalem as his daughter. The

renewed Jerusalem will no longer see the images associated with warfare. The Lord now invites the citizens of the New Jerusalem to watch for the arrival of the king who will introduce a new age for them. The ideal King will establish a reign of peace extending beyond the boundaries of the Promised Land and will extend to all nations.

Paul in his letter to the Romans reminds us of the choice between two possible principles by which we can live: one is to live by the flesh and the other to live by the Spirit. Flesh in this context refers to a life turned on it, an egoistic life. At the center of the flesh principle are such things as pride, arrogance and ambition. Those who live according to the flesh give themselves to human logic and power alone. The other choice is the Spirit. Those who live according to the Spirit give themselves to Jesus. They are full of promise, life and growth. Baptism brought the Spirit of God and of Christ into our lives. Because of this and our continuing union with the Trinity, Paul can say that we live in the Spirit that is we live with our hearts open to God. Paul reminds us that while in this world we are still in a struggle against sin. He tells us that we owe nothing to the flesh. In fact with the spirit's help we are to put to death the deeds of the flesh, the tendency to sin. As Paul stated, if the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies by His indwelling in us. But to continue to dwell in us, we must welcome the Holy Spirit and at the same time must have faith in Christ.

In the Gospel of today Jesus says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. When we live our Christian life as a new creation, enjoying the gifts that we have received during the Sacrament of Baptism, we think spiritually. When we think spiritually, we are no longer burdened by the worldly ways because we are walking our living faith and hope with a spiritual heart. In this passage Matthew emphasizes the observation of Jesus that the humble persons are truly God's kind of people. Jesus the carpenter was one of them. Thus in this passage Jesus begins by praising God for the revelation that has been hidden from the so called wise and learned but revealed it all to the child-like or simple persons. In this case the wise and learned are probably the Scribes and Pharisees who were acclaimed to be experts in the law and its application. The child-like or the infants are references to the disciples of Jesus who by most standards had no claim to fame. They were just simple ordinary persons whom Jesus had chosen to be his followers. We must note that this message does not condemn intellectual pursuit or achievement. They are praiseworthy and necessary in the community and in

the church. What Jesus is condemning is the intellectual pride. He is not connecting faith with ignorance but rather he is connecting faith with simplicity and humility, openness and trust. He tells us that revelation is given to those humble and simple persons who are willing to open themselves to God and listen to him.

Jesus continues to explain in his teaching that he and God share an intimate relationship based on mutual knowledge. So much is this case and practical situation that the only way to know the Father is to know the Son. The so called wise and learned have rejected Jesus as the Son of God, cutting them off from the divine message and hold on to what they claim to be the best. They do not have access to the divine revelation and thus they are left in ignorance, manifested through their rejection. On the other hand the disciples of Jesus have accepted him, based on their personal experience and not based on theory or theology. Thus while Jesus speaks as a wise person, he is presented as someone far greater than that. Jesus is the Son of God and the revelation of the Father and the wisdom of Jesus reflect the revelation of God. Those who come to him will find relief from the many hardships and burdens of life. With Jesus close to us these burdens are not heavy. Instead he leads us to rest which is to be understood in terms of Sabbath rest. Reflecting on the language found in the Book of Wisdom, Jesus refers to his teaching as a Yoke. The wisdom Jesus teaches is like having a yoke without stress or burden. Traditionally a yoke is something that provided discipline and guidance for work animals. It is also found in the writings of the Old Testament as an image of wisdom. Unlike the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees, the yoke Jesus provides is easy and his burden is light. To have an easy yoke and a light burden is an apparent contradiction. Only those who believe in Jesus can be recipients of such grace. This is because of the relationship that exists between him and those who follow him. Jesus is with us and is for us as our guide strength and support.

Jesus certainly knew all about yokes. As a carpenter he would have been asked from time to time to make wooden yokes for farmers so that they could have their oxen to pull a plough or other farm implement together. The yoke is the wooden crossbeam that joined the two animals at the neck and that crossbeam dragged the farm implement. Since animals are different sizes it was common to have a yoke cut to measure for the animals pulling it. Otherwise it would not fit the animal correctly and cause considerable discomfort. As a carpenter Jesus must have cut many such yokes. The yoke that Jesus gives for us does not cause

discomfort but brings us comfort because the yoke of Jesus is easy and light. The invitation of Jesus to us is to accept not a yoke that weighs us down but a yoke that is easy and light, for he says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. There is still another way of understanding the image of the yoke. Think of it as a double yoke, where two oxen can work together better. We now have a lovely image of Jesus and I yoked together, pulling together to spread his kingdom. Then his call to shoulder his yoke becomes a call to share his yoke with him. Where I go, he goes along with me, pulling together with me and making it all the more easier. When Jesus says, "My burden is light and my yoke is easy," there is something very compelling and attractive about it. The Greek word which describes the yoke as 'easy' has a richer connotation. It means, good, gentle, benevolent, benign, pleasant, and in fact comfortable. 'Come, you weary ones,' Jesus is saying, 'turn in your heavy burdens and wearisome yokes that lock you into despair and shackle you to anxiety. Live life my way and place your burdens on me and they will be light. Your yokes too will be gentle and in fact, pleasant if you are with me.

Jesus does not promise a life without burdens or weariness. On the other hand he offers a way of overcoming them. His is not an easy way out of problems but rather a liberating way into solutions. This is the wisdom that is hidden from the intelligent and the wise, but which is obvious to infants. Trust as children trust, Jesus says. Let a loving parent take your hand. Shelter on a mother's breast; be carried on your father's shoulders. Have confidence in a parent's promise. Live as though your needs are noticed, respected, provided. Underneath are the everlasting arms that constantly invite his disciples for rest. In this personal invitation he repeats that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. We are so good at bearing heavy burdens. Certainly we in normal life compete with one another for the prize of being the busiest, of working the longest hours, of being the most exhausted, of having the most complicated schedules and the most demanding tasks. Often we pat ourselves on our back for having achieved it all on our own, without the help of anyone, indeed in spite of the hindering obstructions thrown in our way. Our burdens are heavy at times and our work can be tiring.

Whatever demands Jesus may make on our following of him, he wants to be at all times truly a source of comfort, of consolation, of forgiveness and of reconciliation. Whatever demands life may be making on us, he is there too to be called on. When we are in difficulties and pain, we can ask him to take them

away. He may not always do so but we can expect him to restore our peace. For we need to remember that Jesus is not to be seen as an escape from our problems but a support. Sometimes he will give us peace not from our pain but within our pain. There can be the danger that we expect Jesus or his Mother or some saint or the Church to be there to wave a magic wand that wipes away all our problems, all difficulties, all obstacles. Jesus' own life is an excellent example. In the garden of Gethsemane, faced with imminent arrest, torture and execution, he showed a perfectly normal human reaction to the threat of death. Jesus begged his Father to spare him going through this appalling ordeal. "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me," he prayed. But at the end of his prayer he added: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Today we have the message from Jesus to come to him and receive the rest he alone can give. It is a call to a personal relationship. He takes us away from the impersonal relationship of law to a personal relationship of love and makes us enter a joyful life giving relationship. In coming to the person of Jesus we discover that far from being burdened, we are fully liberated. He invites us to place the yoke of ours on our shoulders and follow him. Normally any carpenter knows that if the yoke does not fit it hurts and leaves a painful mark. But the yoke of love which Jesus gives does not leave any wound or deep mark. It is a burden of love and it can never be painful. All of us surely remember the story of a small boy appearing out of the snow storm carrying a little boy on his back. When a compassionate person observed him and said: "that is a heavy load for you to be carrying." To which the boy replied, "He is not really heavy sir, he is my brother." In a similar way Jesus has carried the burden of ours personally and hence the very presence of his makes our burden light.

In a certain village in Umbria (Italy), there lived a man who was always bewailing his lot. He was a Christian, and found the weight of his cross too heavy to bear. One night, before going to sleep, he begged God to let him change his burden. That night he had a dream; the Lord led him to a warehouse. "Go ahead and change it," he said. The man saw crosses of all sizes and shapes, with the names of their owners. He picked an average size cross – but when he saw the name of an old friend written on it, he left it aside. Finally, as God had permitted, he chose the smallest cross he could find. To his surprise, he saw his own name written on it.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed

two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it: "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me and go away." The Lord replied: "My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was the time I carried you in my arms."

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