

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2005

As you know, the Israelites went through many trials and suffering. In time of hardships, one of the roles of the prophets was to help people keep their hope alive by announcing to them God's consolation and visitation. The message of the prophet Zechariah that we heard in the first reading proclaims precisely a time of peace and liberation from God. This is the reason for joy and gladness to which the prophet invites the people: the end of suffering is in sight; the Messiah is about to appear. He will be a just and a victorious king; he will be the liberator of his people.

Let me remind you that whenever a prophet gives a message, it always refers to both short term and to long term. With regard to the short term, it can be said that when Israel was a colonized country, exploited and oppressed by foreign powers, every rising of a new king was seen as God's attempt to liberate his people. What is surprising, however, in the prophecy of Zechariah is that he promises a savior who will not come at the head of a powerful army, with horses and chariots, but "meek and riding on an ass". Such a king will remove from the city every sign of military power; he will destroy all weapons of war and all means of violence. In spite of all that, he will be victorious and his reign will go to the ends of the earth.

This prophecy by Zechariah is the opposite of the popular idea of what a king should be: he is not one who will be served, he is the one who will focus his attention on the needs of others; the helpers and defenseless are not dominated by him, he puts himself at the service of all. His strength is what people consider weakness. Jesus will fulfill this prophecy literally when entering Jerusalem on a donkey. That act will show, how in the long run, Jesus is the expected king, the peaceful one who will conquer human hearts with his sympathy and love.

In this context you understand why in today's Gospel Jesus is praising his Father for having hidden such knowledge to the wise and the well instructed and revealed it to the little ones. These words of Jesus do not mean that God is annoyed with the learned or the important people, or that he does not like them. He is simply acknowledging a fact and affirming that this is within the plan of God. The poor, the humble, the lowly have been the first to accept and to welcome his word of liberation. In other words, to be truly Christ's disciple one should have a heart of the poor, a soul of the little ones. What I am saying here does not mean that Christianity is reserved to naïve people or to silly ones, it means only that God needs an open heart, which is aware of one's misery, that needs God and counts completely on him.

Moreover, to welcome Jesus and to accept him does not mean not heaving troubles, problems or sufferings. The disciple is not outside the human

condition with all its difficulties. This is why Jesus shows a real concern for all those who are burdened and pain. *"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest"*, he says. Do we accept the invitation to turn our burdens over to him and allow him to refresh us? Do you accept and agree to give him all your problems and all your concerns, your many difficulties and trust him? Turn it all over to the Lord, your feelings of being overwhelmed with financial burdens, the down times in your marriage, the boring aspects of your job, your continual concern for your children, your health concerns, and so forth. Turn it all over to the Lord and be at peace. Have faith that no matter what happens, if you have union with the Lord, all will be well.

Jesus says also: *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me... and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light"*. Let us remind ourselves what a yoke is. A yoke is a wooden crosspiece fastened over the necks of two oxen and attached to plough or to draw a wagon. In this context, the yoke allows the two animals to pull together. The work being shared, when the day is done, the oxen are tired, but not exhausted. The yoke makes the burden light. When Christ says: "take my yoke, the burden is light", he introduces himself as our teammate who bears the burden of the day with us. He wears the other yoke as our partner and provides the grace to live without being exhausted. We might get tired with our problems and difficulties. The oxen get tired as their yoke pulls the load. But we will not be exhausted. Jesus occupies the other side of the yoke. The yoke of Christ makes life easy.

In fact, the yoke and the burden of Jesus are submission to the reign of God. This imposes no-further burden on those who accept it, but rather makes it easier for them to bear the burdens they already have. To welcome Jesus as the messenger of God and to believe in him is not accepting new obligations, but entering a new way of living that releases us from burdens and weariness and makes it easier to live under his will.

Let us ask God through this celebration to fill us with the strength of the Holy Spirit so that we may be able to accept Christ as our teammate and our yoke-mate. Living accordingly to his Spirit we can cross the burdens of this life with him and enter the Kingdom of his Father where the heritage of the resurrection is prepared for us forever.



Homily Date: July 03, 2005
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20050703homily.pdf