

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the joy of the kingdom of God. They remind us of the values that make that kingdom unique and different from earthly ones. They invite us to practice those values in order to effectively belong to it.

The first reading describes the prophecy of Zechariah which announces a time of consolation and visitation that will come upon Israel. It describes the joy that will come on Jerusalem when God will visit his people. It equally shows how that moment will be a time of expansion and peace where there will be no more war in the land.

What is behind this text is the idea that God consoles his people anytime they are in distress. Another idea is the truth that whatever might be the hardness of the suffering and the length of the distress of God's people, the time will come when God will put an end to it. The last idea is related to the truth that the time of God's intervention will be a moment of liberation, rejoicing and consolation.

This text allows us to understand the stake of today's Gospel as Jesus invites those who labor and are burdened to come to him and receive rest. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus thanking his Father who, in his will, has revealed to the little ones and hidden to the learned and the wise the mystery of God's kingdom. Then, it recalls his statement stating that all things have been given him by the Father. After that, the Gospel describes another statement of Jesus claiming that no one knows the Son except the Father, as well as no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom he wishes to reveal him.

Finally, the gospel ends up with Jesus' invitation to those laboring and burdened so that they trust him and come to him and have rest. What do we learn from this Gospel?

Today I want to talk about the compassion of Jesus. Let me start this way. Each one of us has had, in one way or another, the experience of physical, mental, psychological or emotional suffering. I believe also that each one has been confronted with problems such that one has tried anything in order to resolve it, but without success. The experience of suffering or that of an unresolved problem is very revealing of the human fragility and powerlessness.

When people suffer, especially in their body, they all feel that something is missing for the balance of their body and mind. Sometimes people live their suffering as a real trial and test because, in spite of their good will to get well and all the help they can get from doctors, things do not follow up at all. In the end, the suffering becomes like a burden that someone would like to get rid of, but without success.

At such moments, many are shaken in their convictions of life and wonder why things are going so bad with them. Some others lose their faith in God and stop practicing or do not put their foot in the Church anymore. It is in such moments we hear the words like: "I cannot make it any longer"; "I am tired of fighting without any relief", "I am exhausted and cannot make it anymore".

Those difficult moments, as hard and discouraging as they might be, can be an occasion to come close to God and an opportunity to let him enter into our life. But for that to happen, we need to surrender to Jesus. We need to offer him our problems and sufferings so that he takes care of them. That is why Jesus is asking us to come to him,

we who are exhausted with hardships and problems, so that he may give us rest. He is asking us to entrust to him our problems and sufferings so that he may give us relief.

When we entrust our problems and sufferings to Jesus, it does not mean necessarily that they are all resolved once and for all so that our illness is over or our difficulty is gone. What it means is rather that we stop fighting alone. We make Jesus our partner in the fight so that he shares everything with us. In this way, our problem might still be there, but despite it, we have peace and are not desperate.

The big challenge we face here is the courage to surrender to Jesus. The intellectual pride is a major obstacle to our surrendering to Jesus, because we want to be in control of everything happening to us.

In fact, we have been educated in such a way that we have to fight until we find a solution to our problem. There is nothing wrong with all that. The reverse side of this coin, however, is that we can be so counting on ourselves that we do not see the necessity of counting on God. And I believe that Psalm 127 is still valid: "If the Lord does not watch over the city, it is in vain that the watchers are mounting the guard".

In that sense, we understand why Jesus is praising his Father for having hidden those things from the learned and the wise and revealed them to the little ones, that is, the humble of heart. Only those who submit themselves to Jesus in their suffering can experience the peace of mind. It is for that reason that Jesus is talking about sharing the yoke with him so that we find rest.

In the Jewish society, indeed, a yoke was a wooden crosspiece attached to the necks of two oxen in order to plough or to draw a wagon. The yoke allowed the two animals to pull together without being exhausted by the burden of the work. When Jesus invites us to take his yoke so that the burden might be light, he wants to tell us that when we entrust our problems to him, he becomes our teammate who bears everything with us. Like in the case of the two oxen, he takes the other side of the yoke and provides for us the grace we need to go through our hardships without being destroyed. Let us ask in this celebration the grace of submission to Jesus.

Let us ask the Father to give us the Spirit of courage so that we accept to share our problems with Jesus. Let us ask him to help us take the yoke of Jesus and find our peace in him. May God bless you all!

Zachariah 9: 9-10; Romans 8: 9, 11-13; Matthew 11: 25-30

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