

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

When we read the history of the world, we learn that beside the holocaust, the people of Israel went through many troubles and suffering. In every difficult time, one of the roles of the prophets was to help the people cope with the situation in keeping their faith in God and to hope for his consolation and visitation.

The message of the prophet Zechariah we heard in today's first reading has to be situated in that context. The prophet proclaims precisely a time of peace and liberation from God. The people have to rejoice and be glad because the end of their 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.

We have to know that whenever a prophet prophesizes, his message refers always to both short term and 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 in the country 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 a king "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. The Messiah is not someone who will be served; instead he is the one who will focus his attention on the needs of others and serve them.

Jesus will fulfill this prophecy of Zechariah when entering Jerusalem on a donkey. That act will show, how in the long run, Jesus was the expected king, the peaceful one who will conquer human hearts with his sympathy and love. In that context we 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 by the intellectuals, or the important people or that he does not like them. Here Jesus is simply acknowledging a fact and affirming a truth that is within God's plan, namely that God has preference for the humble and the poor. The poor, the humble and the lowly, indeed, have been the first to accept Jesus and to welcome his word of salvation. Remember how at his birth, it was the shepherd who welcomed him with joy while Scribes and Pharisees fought him constantly.

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 the silly ones, it means only that God needs an open heart of the one who is aware of one's misery, one who knows that he truly needs God and counts completely on him.

To welcome and accept Jesus does not mean not necessarily being out of 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 the invitation of our Lord? Do you 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, and 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, with our Lord, it will be fine.

Our Lord 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. 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. As the oxen get tired, their yoke pulls the load. So, they are not exhausted. So, we will not be exhausted when Jesus occupies the other side of the yoke of our burdens. The yoke of Christ makes life easy.

The yoke and the burden of Jesus are submission to the reign of God. Our Lord imposes no-further burden on those who accept him, but rather makes it easier for them to bear the burdens of life they already have. To welcome our Lord 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 guidance.

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 our Lord 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. Amen

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



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