

## Readings for Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> Week of the Year

FIRST READING: Zechariah 9:9-10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Zechariah:

Thus says the LORD: Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass. He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; the warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14

***I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.***

I will extol you, O my God and King, and I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever.

***I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.***

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.

***I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.***

Let all your works give you thanks, O Lord, and let your faithful ones bless you. Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might.

***I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.***

The Lord is faithful in all his words and holy in all his works. The Lord lifts up all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

***I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.***

SECOND READING: Romans 8:9, 11-13

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans:

Brothers and sisters: You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you. Consequently, brothers and sisters, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

The word of the Lord.

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

At that time Jesus exclaimed: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to little ones. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

The Gospel of the Lord

### **Reflection for Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> Week of the Year**

What did Jesus say? Does God hide things from us? Most of us, as being human, have learned many things and can use what we know in very clever ways. This gospel has a twist, a reversal of expectations. Does God reveal things to children and not us? What is the quality that Jesus is seeing in children and not in learned, clever people? At first glance, maybe the quality is innocence. However, most children are any thing but innocent. Anyone who has spent any time with the merest children or little ones will tell you different. If you don't watch them, constantly, they'll try to get away with anything or do all the things they're not supposed to do. Perhaps children have a less cynical view of life and experience. Most of us can have good baloney detectors when listening to the hype we hear in advertisements and political promises. Don't fool yourselves. Most kids can see through our adult hypocrisy too.

I really don't think Jesus means that at all. I think Jesus refers to the unexpected. We expect that the learned and clever will get it, not kids. How does Jesus promise rest? We take on a yoke. A yoke is a means to do heavy labor. It's what farmers put on horses, mules or oxen to plow a field or pull a wagon. What is Jesus yoke? It was the cross. Jesus, on the way to the site of his execution, would have been bound to the cross-bar upon which he would be nailed. To take on a yoke does not sound to me as a way to rest. How can Jesus' burden be light?

The reason Jesus gives is that he is meek and humble of heart. Take a look at the leaders of nations, corporations and world religions. How many of them are truly meek and humble? They are surrounded with the trappings of national, corporate or ecclesial power. Many of them live in the best house on the block. When they speak people listen, sometimes through out the entire world. Some even abuse their authority or power. This leads me to ask a question, or two. What is meekness? What is humility? Jesus was both God and human, we believe and know. Jesus, therefore, had all the power in the universe. Yet, Jesus lived the life of a normal, human being. Jesus knew who he was. Self knowledge is the seed of humility. From that seed can grow self acceptance. Jesus was comfortable in his own skin. He was able to embrace and incorporate his identity into his mission and ministry. Jesus' mission was to die on the cross to redeem the human race from sin and death. Jesus' ministry was to serve those he met.

Knowing this was Jesus' humility. Jesus' meekness came from seeking to do the Father's will and relying on the Father's love.

There is a prayer found in the former translation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation. "When we were lost and could not find the way to you, you loved us more than ever: Jesus, your Son, innocent and without sin, gave himself into our hands and was nailed to a cross. Yet before he stretched out his arms between heaven and earth in the everlasting sign of your covenant, he desired to celebrate the Paschal feast in the company of his disciples." This is one of the most beautiful renditions of Jesus' mission and ministry I have ever read and prayed. The current translation says basically the same thing but not as well. The grammar is awkwardly stilted and each paragraph is a run-on sentence. They lack the simplicity and fluidity of the former.

In other words, God received the punishment for our sins and died in our place for them. Jesus did not die, peacefully, in his sleep. He was executed as a criminal. St. Paul called the cross a "Stumbling block for Jews and an absurdity to Greeks." We call the Paschal Mystery of Jesus the Good News. Jesus died as a criminal but rose from the dead as God. His death frees us from sin and death. God forgives our sins and, when we die, we have the promise of eternal life. This is the message that St. Paul gives in the second reading from Romans. In Jesus, we have died to sin and have received the gift of life in the Spirit.

How are we children? We believe through God's gift of faith. Faith comes from God. It is not of our making. Neither can we earn it through our good deeds. Jesus, through the cross, won faith for us too. Faith is revealed to us who are God's children. Each of us is God's beloved son or daughter. Each of us is a beloved brother or sister of Jesus. In Jesus, we are all brothers and sisters. God is love, eternal and unconditional. We can love God, ourselves and each other because of this revelation.

How can Jesus' yoke, the cross bring rest? We can always speak of the promise of eternal rest. However, if that's all the promise reveals, we can fall into the trap set by Carl Marx. He called religion the "Opiate of the masses." Faith in God only touches our lives in heaven, not in the hell-on-earth. This would make the gospel the bad news. Jesus means what he says, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." We can find support and rest in Jesus now, when we need it the most. We need the promise when we sin. Jesus forgives us. Any time we think of God actively or when God serendipitously pops into our thoughts we can find rest. Each time we pray or when unable, the Spirit receives us in prayer. The time it takes for prayer is a time of rest, a break in our routine. We glimpse, in those moments, the expanse of eternity with God.

In our modern, western society we have two basic states in life. We work and we escape work. In the ancient culture of the Bible there was a third. The Jewish Sabbath is manifestation of it. On the Sabbath people rested, not from work. They rested in God. The third way is to rest in God. Jesus promise comes from that. If anyone has ever gone on retreat, been to a parish Lenten mission or attended a day of reflection, resting in God is what we have done. When over, we can leave renewed, refreshed and rested. During this pandemic we have a lot more time. Some of this time, I am sure, has been, for us all, moments and times when we have rested in God.

Since the two main modes of our society are work and escape from work, we can miss those moments. They occur and pass without our awareness. Once we name the experiences as knowing rest, renewal and refreshment we will know them more often. Back in the seventies, psychologists spoke of peak experiences; moments of a sense of closeness with others, the warmth of the moment or the joy of experiencing life. People could stop, smell the roses and experience the wonder of life in the moment. All of us have had the powerful feeling of closeness, warmth and joy of some gatherings of family, friends or church community. These are experiences of Shabbat, when we rest, together in the arms of God.

Resting in the arms of God is not just in the high moments like these. They also can occur in times that are low as well. This pandemic is not the best of times. The numbers continue to increase of those who contract the COVID 19 and those who die of it. The pandemic will continue until there is a cure. Only when we have an effective course of treatment for the symptoms and the resistance to it that a vaccine can give can we relax. During this time, have we still felt close to God from time to time? In times of great loss or in time of tremendous turmoil have we ever felt relief, insight or comfort? In those moments, too, do we rest in God?

There is also a very common experience we can have. Some people report some shame that when they pray, they may fall asleep. People will also say that while they pray, they will find that their minds have drifted away from their prayers. People have often told me that listening to me, while I preach, they will lose track of what I say and wind up lost in other thoughts. St. Paul addresses this human phenomenon. He says that when we are not able to pray, the Holy Spirit will pray within us. He told us that when we drift like that, the Spirit takes us to the place we need to go. It isn't daydreaming or napping. It is a true rest in God. God gives us what we need to encounter God be it thoughts or memories of our lives, falling asleep and finding physical rest or reminders of what our day may bring.

In our meekness we can acknowledge that all we have, all we are and all who love us comes as God's gift. God truly leads our steps. When we turn to God to forgive us, it is in our meekness. When we acknowledge our sins, honestly, when we accept ourselves in our strength and weakness and when we can embrace ourselves as God has made us, which is good and in God's own image and likeness, we are humble. This is a gift that God reveals to merest children, God's beloved sons and daughters, despite our knowledge and cleverness.

Jesus, through the mystery of the cross, has saved us by removing the burden of sin that leads to death. Jesus, through the mystery of the Incarnation, became a human being like us in all things but sin. In becoming fully human, God shares our experience as we live life. God's presence in our lives can make the human burden light, or at least a bit lighter.

The pandemic continues to rage; our responsibility to one another remains first and foremost. We keep ourselves safe as we keep each other safe.

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