

Homily of Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2020

Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 145:1-14; Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30

The first reading is Prophet Zechariah's prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ. As we see in the reading, Zechariah prophesied Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, "See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass, a foal of an ass." In this prophecy, Zechariah pointed out that Jesus is a king and just savior. Zechariah went further to explain Jesus' ministry. He would banish the chariots, the horse and warrior's bow; proclaim peace; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Zechariah was prophesying the spiritual battle Jesus would fight, and the spread of Christianity to every part of the world.

Jesus came to a people who were burdened and under several yokes. They were under the burden and yoke of the Roman colonial masters and corrupt officials. The ordinary people were under the yoke and burden of rules and regulations of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Lawyers, the Scribes, and the Chief Priests. The Samaritans (Gentiles) were under the burden and yoke of rejection from the Jews. Additionally, many people were also under the burden and yoke of sicknesses and demonic possessions. Very importantly, the whole world, at that time, was under the burden and yoke of sin, and in need of salvation. For all these Jesus says, "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."

Even now, our world is weighed down by severe burdens and yokes of all kinds. If our political and economic rulers and leaders act as we read in the first reading: banish "chariot" and "horses;" that is, stop wars and violence, and "proclaim peace to the nations," we will live in a better world. If our political and economic rulers and leaders follow the footsteps of Jesus, by becoming meek and humble, and works towards removing various burdens and yokes (hardships) of the people, we will live in a better world. Therefore, we must not fail to pray for our rulers and leaders, that they reason wisely and act justly.

Not only that we are weighed down by all kinds of political, economic and social burdens and yokes, we are, also, weighed down by all kinds of afflictions. While we are working hard physically, and struggling to cope with the situations around us, we need spiritual sustenance. For this reason, Jesus beckons us as he did to the people of his time, "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." St. Augustine of Hippo prays, "You [God] have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you."

St. Paul tells us in the second reading how important our mortal bodies need the Spirit of Christ. St. Paul declares, "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..." Jesus says in John 6:63, "It is the Spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail." If we remain only in the flesh, we will end up badly. Therefore, we all need spiritual sustenance.

Scripture scholars explain that when Jesus says, "take my yoke," he means "let's trade yokes – let me take your burden from you." This reminds me of the African pre-currency trading system called Trade by Barter, whereby people swapped the goods and materials they needed from one another. Jesus invites us to spiritual trade by barter. Let us bring to him our burdens and yokes, and swap refreshment and Spirit from him. Darrell Evans' song "I'm Trading my Sorrow" also comes to mind:

*I'm trading my sorrows I'm trading my shame
I'm laying them down for the joy of the Lord.
I'm trading my sickness I'm trading my pain
I'm laying them down for the joy of the Lord.*

*We say
Yes Lord yes Lord yes yes Lord
Yes Lord yes Lord yes yes Lord
Yes Lord yes Lord yes yes Lord.
Amen*

*I am pressed but not crushed
Persecuted not abandoned
Struck down but not destroyed.
I am blessed beyond the curse
For His promise will endure
That His joy's gonna be my strength.*

*Though the sorrow may last for the night
His joy comes with the morning.*

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP