

Jesus invites you to rest, to learn, to let go

14th Sunday of Year A – July 5, 2020

Readings: Zech 9:9-10; Rom 8:9,11-13; Mt 11:25-30

“I thank you, Father, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent, and have revealed them to infants” (Mt 11:25)

Prologue: The first reading and Jesus’ cry of jubilation in the gospel indicate the Messiah’s humble demeanour, which becomes a model for his followers to be humble and open like infants—resting in him, learning true wisdom from him, and letting go of their burden to travel along his paths.

Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. The first reading from the so-called ‘minor prophet’ Zechariah is a prophecy dated after 520 B.C. when the people returned from the Babylonian exile. Seeing the city and the temple of Jerusalem in ruins, the people were depressed. In this context, Zechariah breathes hope with a Messianic prophesy, a ‘cry of jubilation’—similar to the one of Jesus in the gospel passage—“Rejoice, O daughter Zion, shout aloud O daughter Jerusalem!” The inhabitants of Jerusalem must now rejoice because: “Your king comes to you.” But this king, a successor of David, will not come in pomp and splendour like the conquering, invading monarchs of the day, but riding a donkey. Moreover, “He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off” (v.10a,b). The chariot, war-horse and battle-bow are symbols of violence and war. By contrast, the Messiah will put an end to war and will usher in an era of peace and justice. “His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River—referring to the Euphrates, the farthest point in the East known at that time—to the ends of the earth” (v.10d) the farthest point to the West. This passage is also read on Palm Sunday when Christ the king enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey: meek and humble.
2. The third reading from chapter 11 of the gospel according to Matthew is set in a context of stubbornness and hardheartedness of some of Jesus’ hearers—mainly the scribes and the Pharisees—who refuse to listen to him and reject his teachings. Of these he asks: “To what will I compare this generation?” (Mt 11:16). Nothing pleases them. Nothing will change their fossilized mindsets. On the one hand, when John the Baptist called for repentance and lived an austere lifestyle they condemned him, saying: “He has a demon” (11:18); and on the other, when Jesus lived a normal life—mixing with people, eating and drinking—they labelled him: “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (11:19). At weddings they would neither sing nor dance, at funerals they would neither mourn nor weep, so to say. All their excuses are but coverups and camouflages for their lack of openness and their refusal to see truth as it unfolds before their eyes. They would rather hold on to their privileges and power—most of which came from their stringent observance of the Law—pretending to be ‘holier-than-thou’ in public, while burdening the poor with obsolete rules and backbreaking rituals and regulations. These people are the self-proclaimed, “wise and the intelligent” who know little and learn nothing as compared to the “the infants”: namely, the fisherfolk, tax-collectors and so-called ‘sinners’ who were open to the work of the Spirit and in awe of the wonders worked by God through the Christ, Jesus.

3. Jesus' exclamation: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to babes" is reminiscent of the invitation of Wisdom in the First Testament (Sirach 51:23-26) making Jesus the mind, wisdom, face and voice of God, so to say, in calling his hearers to experience rest and to gain true knowledge by accepting his invitation to "come!" This cry of Jesus—which has its parallel in Luke 10:21, where Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit"—is sometimes called "the synoptic thunderbolt from the Johannine sky" since it sounds more like a piece out of John's gospel, especially the part where Jesus claims that he and Abba-Father share deep knowledge of one another. Be that as it may, it is important to focus on the invitation that Jesus holds out to the simple folks of his time, which are also invitations to you and me, today.

Linking the Second Reading to the Theme: In the 2nd reading, Paul contrasts the unspiritual with the spiritual: being "in the flesh" versus "in the Spirit" (v.9)—the latter referring to all that is redeemed through our life in Christ; the former, to either that which is yet to be redeemed or is beyond redemption. Paul is calling Christians – both, as individuals and as community – to conversion and redemption through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us. Are we open to the power and prompting of the Spirit or closed in upon ourselves like the scribes and Pharisees of old?

Christ's Triple Call and Invitation:

The Invitation to Rest: "Come to me ... and I will give you rest" is a captivating call to find repose in the Lord alone of whom Augustine says: "Our hearts were made for you, O Lord, and ever restless will they be until they rest in you." Are our minds restless and our hearts troubled these days, burdened as we are with the pandemic? Come! Rest in Him!

The Invitation to Learn: The learning which the Lord offers us is for the wise, not for the merely intelligent; for those who live by the 'law of love' not the 'love of law'; for those who wish to know and love some 'One' in their hearts—God, the Father, and Jesus, God's Son—not many 'things' in their heads. God chooses to reveal Godself not to the haughty but to the humble, not to bigwigs but to the babes: receptive in mind and pure in heart.

The Invitation to Let Go: Rather than being yoked and overburdened by external burdens and minutiae of rites and rituals, the Lord binds us to himself, to each other and to all of creation, at large, drawing us into an ever-widening circle of hopeful, trustful and faithful disciples. It is left to you and me to entrust everything to God and to let go of all that ties us down from being free and faithful.

In Lighter Vein:

A brilliant aeronautical engineer was bragging to his little daughter about his inventions in aeronautics, which made the impossible now possible. "I have achieved so much that I can make people fly just as the birds do! Imagine that, sweetie—I can do everything that the birds can do!" Unimpressed his little daughter asked: "Papa, can you also sit on a barbed wire fence?" Out of the mouths of infants and of babes!
