

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Zechariah 9:9-10

The Book of Zechariah, the name means “Yahweh remembers,” comes chronologically after that of Haggai. The prophet Zechariah belonged to a priestly family which had returned from exile in Babylon. Like Haggai, he was called by God in 520 B.C., the second year of the reign of Darius. He probably lived until very near the time the new Temple was finished.

Working in a literary style quite different from Haggai’s but with the same doctrinal content, Zechariah describes in the first six chapters of his book, by means of eight visions, God’s plan for the restoration of the Temple and of the city of Jerusalem, and promises God’s blessing on Israel. As a prerequisite God asks His people for moral correctness; to be shown in acts of justice and mercy, and obedience to His commandments. In the seventh chapter Zechariah tells the people that fasting is pleasing to God if it stems from genuine piety (in Zechariah’s time the Jews gave much importance to fasting but their motivation was at fault because they were more concerned about appearing to others to be good than about seeking God’s favor).

In the ninth chapter, from which our reading for today comes, Judah is set on one side, Judah’s neighbors on the other. God, whose power extends to all nations, takes Judah’s side, and as a ruler who goes to war for his people, He vanquishes Judah’s neighbors. Then the king of peace arrives; an earthly king able to inaugurate his peaceful reign because of the divine victory.

⁹ Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!

There is no distinction to be made between Zion and Jerusalem, both names refer to the city itself.

See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he,

There is disagreement among manuscripts and commentators whether the future is one who saves (the Septuagint and vulgate rendering), or one who has been saved, delivered by God (Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible).

Meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.

This does not indicate humility but rather peaceful intent. The horse was the mount in time of war; the ass was put to use for friendly and solemn entry.

¹⁰ He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim,

A geographical area originally settled by the tribe of Ephraim. The towns include Bethel, Naaran, Gezex, Sheckem, Megiddo, and Dor (1 Chronicles 7:28). At one time it was the largest of the tribes of Israel. Isaiah, Ezekiel and Hosea use the name as a poetic designation of the Northern Kingdom.

and the horse from Jerusalem;

Jerusalem, as used here, it is a designation of the Southern Kingdom.

The warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea,

From the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf.

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

The peaceful rule of this king will extend far beyond Judah into the rest of the inhabited world.

2nd Reading - Romans 8:9, 11-13

For the past two weeks we have been looking at what Saint Paul describes as three ages: Adam to Moses which is the natural period represented by the fallen, unhappy family; Moses to Christ which is the legal period in which one nation is the example; and from Christ onward which is the period of international blessing where all nations are blessed and freed from the Law through the grace of Christ. The ancient rabbis often divided their six thousand years of man's history into these same periods with the understanding that in the last two thousand years the Messiah would give a new law or reinterpret the old one. Saint Paul has recast this period in terms of Jesus the Christ. Chapter 7, which we skip over in our Sunday readings this cycle, contains a description of the doctrine of concupiscence, our tendency to sin as the result of original sin (Romans 7:7-25). In today's reading we hear Saint Paul tell us that Christian life is lived in the Spirit and is destined for glory because Christian life is empowered by the Spirit.

⁹ But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you.

The word translated as "if only" can also be translated "if, in reality." The Spirit, the new principle of Christian vitality, is derived from God, the same source as all other manifestations of salvation. The baptized Christian is not only "in the Spirit," but the Spirit is now said to dwell in him or her.

Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Attachment to Christ is only possible by the indwelling of the Spirit. This is not an external identification with the cause of Christ, or a grateful recognition of what He once did for humanity. The Christian who belongs to Christ is the one empowered to “live for God” through the vitalizing influence of His Spirit. The mention of “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of Christ” in reference to the same Holy Spirit shows that the Spirit comes from the Father and the Son.

¹¹ If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

As in our second reading last week, the efficiency of the resurrection is attributed to the Spirit of the Father. The power vivifying the Christian is traced to its ultimate source; the Spirit is the manifestation of the Father’s presence and power in the world since the resurrection of Christ and through it.

the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The future tense expresses the role of the Spirit in the end time resurrection of Christians. At His resurrection Christ became, through the Father’s glory, the principle of the raising of Christians.

“But he who raised Christ up from the dead will raise us up also if we do His will and walk in His commandments and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness, not rendering blow for blow, or cursing for cursing, but being mindful of what the Lord said in His teaching.” [Saint Polycarp of Smyrna (ca. A.D. 135), *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 2]

¹² Consequently, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

We have an obligation. We are indebted to God to obey His law.

¹³ 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.

We must make use of the Spirit which we have received; this is the debt that is owed to Christ.

“It is right and clear that we are not obliged to follow Adam, who lived according to the flesh, and who by being the first to sin left us an inheritance of sin (see Genesis 3:13-19). On the contrary, we ought rather to obey the law of Christ who, as was demonstrated above, has redeemed us spiritually from death. We are debtors to Him who has washed our spirits, which had been sullied by carnal sins, in baptism, who has justified us and who has made us children of God (see Galatians 3:24-26).” [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles* Romans 8:12]

Gospel - Matthew 11:25-30

Last week we heard the final instructions which Jesus gave His newly commissioned Apostles before sending them out. Jesus has traveled through Galilee but there has not been a national conversion. Instead, in spite of the miracles He has performed, He has largely been ignored and rejected.

²⁵ At that time Jesus said in reply,

This is a typical Jewish blessing formula, except that Jesus refers to God as “Father.”

"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

Divine communication from God.

them to little ones.

Literally, the simple, the uneducated.

²⁶ Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.

Jesus has not reached the wise and prudent; His message has been grasped only by a few disciples who are from the peasant class. Jesus has resigned Himself to this because it is God's will. There is a sense in which Jewish wisdom and learning, which was the knowledge of the Law, was a genuine obstacle to the understanding of the message of Jesus. The more one knew about the Law, the more difficult it was to see that the Messianic revolution would supersede the Law.

²⁷ 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.

Jesus is the absolute Son of the absolute Father. Jesus is the exclusive revelation of the Father. This is a direct contradiction of the Jewish claim to have complete revelation of God in the Law and the Prophets.

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,

Those who are under the yoke of the Law; the metaphor of the yoke is used in rabbinical writings. The import of the saying in itself is more general than this – the weary and the burdened are the poor who have the Good News proclaimed to them. Jesus invites them because He is one of them.

and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you

The yoke and burden of Jesus are submission to the reign of God. This imposes no further burden on those who accept it, but rather makes it easier to bear the burdens they already have.

and learn from me,

The disciple is to be a life-long learner.

for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

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