

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A Cycle, July 5-6, 2014

[This is the prayerful introduction to the Eucharist that I did at the beginning of the Mass]

We are now in “ordinary time” – that’s why I am wearing a green stole. The season of ordinary time began right after the Easter Season ended. The word “*ordinary*” is used not as a synonym for boring or routine, but because it has its roots in the Latin word “*ordinalis*,” which refers to a numbered series. The Sundays of the Church year between the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Lent – and those following Easter, right through to the beginning of Advent – are numbered consecutively except when there is a big feast. Today is the 14th Sunday in ordinary time.

As we move back into ordinary time, we do so recharged by all the energy and excitement of Easter. When the 50 days of the Easter season wrap up with the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, we are reminded by St. Paul that our baptism calls us to go out into the world and use the unique gifts bestowed on each of us to serve the Church and the world.

We return to Ordinary Time as changed people. We have witnessed the extent to which God loves us, and every time we receive the Eucharist we are reminded of the depth of that love. This knowledge, which infuses the entire Church year, makes the coming days and months anything but ordinary.

[adapted from *Living With Christ*, June, 2014, pp. 1-2 by Catherine Mulrooney]

First Reading: Zechariah 9:9-10 (Your messiah shall proclaim peace to the nations.)

Responsorial Psalm 145 “I will praise your name forever, my king and my God.”

Second Reading: Romans 8:9, 11-13 (You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit)

Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30 (Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened)

At that time Jesus prayed,

“Father, Lord of heaven and earth!

I give you praise because you have shown to little children what you have hidden from the learned and the clever.

Father, it is true. You have graciously willed it so.

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 those to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.

Come to me, all of you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon your shoulders 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 is light.”

♪ COME TO ME, ALL WHO LABOR AND ARE HEAVY BURDENED, AND I SHALL GIVE YOU REST.
TAKE UP MY YOKE AND LEARN FROM ME, FOR I AM *MEEK* AND HUMBLE OF HEART,
AND YOU'LL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. YES MY YOKE IS EASY AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT. ♪

The song is from the end of the Gospel I just read.

I have often used this Gospel passage when I visit the sick or the dying. I invite the person I am with to hear Jesus singing to them – calling them into his presence so they can be strengthened while on earth or welcomed into heaven. But the invitation – come to me – is for each of us to come to Jesus today, to hear him calling me by name.

When you receive Communion – for the first time or the 101st – you are promising to become a disciple of Jesus, to take up his yoke. And what is this “yoke” we are called to take up?

When Sr. Anna and I asked a group of college students at a retreat what that image brought to mind, one of them said, "the yellow part of an egg." And sometimes people picture a yoke that links two oxen or horses who are plowing a field. Actually, in Jesus' time, it could be a yoke for a person to wear, like a harness to help them carry a heavy burden. It is even used today to carry maple syrup buckets, and it is used in many cultures in the developing world.

The word translated as "easy" in Greek really means "fits perfectly," so the yoke that Jesus gives me fits my life, even if it does not fit someone else's. When someone who knew how to sew clothes heard this explanation, she told us that in sewing a sleeve on to a garment, she has to make sure to make the ease of the sleeve fit just right.

The Gospel promises rest, healing, peace to anyone who comes to Jesus, whether they are sick or healthy, but it is also a *challenge* to take up his yoke - that is, to live a life that reflects his love and proclaims his truth.

That is a truth that can seem so clear when I am a child receiving my first Communion, but it is still true every time I receive Communion. This Gospel is a call to have a personal relationship with Jesus, to be his disciple, to live the values he preached and lived. It is a call to become what we receive, as I say every time I lift up the host and cup before communion.

I will pray in the preface of today's Eucharistic Prayer, "*We come then to this sacramental table to be transformed by your grace into the likeness of the risen Christ.*" [Preface of the Holy Eucharist II]

And what does it mean to reflect the likeness of the risen Christ? In both the Gospel & the song, Jesus describes himself as "meek." In the first reading from Zechariah, the messiah - the king - comes into the city of Jerusalem. He is described as "a just savior, *meek* and riding on a donkey."

What did that mean to the people of his time? The image of the king in the 1st reading riding on a donkey rather than a horse says that he comes to bring peace rather than war. The words of the prophet are clear, "*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.*"

Both Matthew and John's Gospel quote from today's 1st reading when they tell the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They are saying that Jesus is a king who conquers, but not by violence or war. So if we are to live as his followers, we are called to be peacemakers.

And what does it mean to call Jesus "meek"? It does not mean "weak" even though it rhymes. The word in Greek means literally, "*not easily provoked*" or "*acting out of controlled power.*" As a verb, the word translated as meek was used to describe training a horse.

The horse was a symbol of strength to the people of Jesus' time, and it still is, to a degree, in our own time. To make a horse "meek" was to make the horse totally responsive to its rider, without taking away its strength or power. Jesus was meek, as if he were a strong horse ridden by the Holy Spirit, entirely ready to obey the will of God at every moment.

The third beatitude, part of the Gospel Jesus taught, is "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land.*" To take up the yoke of Jesus is to be like him, to be meek - totally open to the will of God and as responsive as a good horse to the call to follow the Lord.

To be like Jesus is to live by the Spirit that St. Paul writes about in the 2nd reading. To follow *this* Messiah is to reject violence as a solution to the problems we confront. It means to reject the violence of oppression of the poor, the violence of destruction of the environment, the violence of abortion, violence against women, and violence against people of other races or nations, or sexual orientation.

As we celebrate the gift of freedom on this 4th of July weekend, we are called to imitate the one we call the prince of peace, the one who was meek - totally responsive to the will of God. As disciples of Christ, we are called to celebrate the *ideals* of our nation - a country that has brought people of every race, ethnic group and way of life together.

But we, as individuals, as a community and as a nation, are also called to challenge what St. Paul calls "the flesh" in the 2nd reading. The Greek word translated as "flesh" does not mean the body or our sexuality. It means, as Paul uses it, everything in us that is self-centered rather than God-centered. It describes the fear that leads to condemnation & violence, the addiction to wealth that leads to the collapse of economic systems, the lust for power and control that leads to war & murder.

To live in the Spirit rather than in the flesh is to embrace a patriotism that goes beyond nationalism, to celebrate a love of country that sees the good of our world and of the poor as a blessing for our native land and our families & communities. The 4th degree of the Knights of Columbus is founded on this kind of patriotism.

Pope John Paul II, now St. John Paul, wrote these words about patriotism at the dawn of the new millennium:

"Patriotism is a love for everything to do with our native land: its history, its traditions, its language, its natural features... The native land is the common good of all citizens and as such it imposes a serious duty ... [But there is] the risk of allowing this essential function of the nation to lead to an unhealthy nationalism. Of this the 20th century has supplied some all-too-eloquent examples, with disastrous consequences..."

Whereas nationalism involves recognizing and pursuing the good of one's own nation alone, without regard for the rights of others - Patriotism, on the other hand, is a love for one's native land that accords rights to all other nations equal to those claimed for one's own."

There is a hymn that sets this kind of patriotism to music. Most of us know the first verse by heart, but the 2nd verse is a prayer that invites us to challenge what needs changing as well to celebrate what is good.

♪ O beautiful for pilgrim feet whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat across the wilderness!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law! ♪