

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A Cycle, July 2-3, 2011

First Reading: Zechariah 9:9-10 [your king shall come to you, meek and riding on a donkey]

Responsorial Psalm: 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, and you will find rest]

♪ 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.

In both the Gospel & the song, Jesus describes himself as "meek."

In the first reading, 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.*"

When both Matthew and John's Gospel quote from Zechariah 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.

And what does it mean to call Jesus "meek"? Words such as "timid" or "gentle" or even "weak" often come to mind. However, 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 heart of the teach of Jesus, 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 abortion, of oppression of the poor, of destruction of the earth, the air and the water, and to reject using or approving of violence against people of other races or nations, or sexual orientation.

As we prepare to celebrate the gift of freedom on the 4th of July, 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. 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. As I will pray in the preface of today's Eucharistic Prayer, "*Jesus spoke a message of peace and taught us to live as brothers and sisters. His message took form in the vision of our ancestors as they fashioned a nation where we might live as one.*"

But we, as individuals, as a community and as a nation, still have to fight against what St. Paul calls "the flesh" in the 2nd reading. That does not mean the flesh on our bodies. The Greek word translated as "flesh" 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.

The 4th degree of the Knights of Columbus is founded on *this* kind of patriotism.

Blessed Pope John Paul II, at the dawn of the new millennium,

wrote these words about patriotism:

"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.

How can we be delivered from such a danger? I think the right way is through patriotism. 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. Patriotism, in other words, leads to a properly ordered social love."

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. It can be sung as a prayer for our country and ourselves?

♪ 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! ♪