

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 145 (144); Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus said: take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls

Matt 11:25 At that time Jesus said, “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 infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Matt 11:28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The first part of this passage (11:25-27) is found also in Luke (10:21-22; there is no comparable passage in Mark). The Lucan version has slight variations as well as the typically Lucan addition of “rejoicing in the Holy Spirit”. The second part, vv. 28-30, is unique to Matthew. The language of the passage is very striking—quite different to the usual manner of expression in Matthew and indeed Luke.

Because of the resemblance to the way Jesus speaks in the Fourth Gospel it has often been referred to as a “Johannine bolt of lightning” in the Synoptic tradition. The verses shared by Matthew and Luke come from that hypothetical document on which both of them drew, the Q or “Source” document.

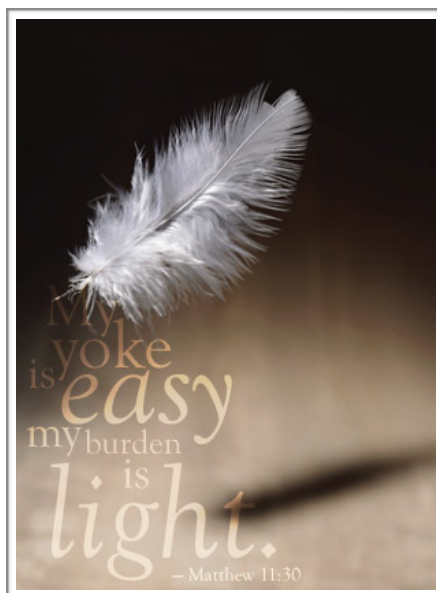
OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

V. 25: Therefore mortals fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in

their own conceit. (Job 37:24) Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. (Psalms 8:2)

V. 28: This is personified wisdom, inviting all who desire wisdom to come to her. “Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits. (Sirach 24:19) Draw near to me, you who are uneducated, and lodge in the house of instruction. (Sirach 51:23)

V. 30: Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, “We will not walk in it.” (Jeremiah 6:16) Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by. See with your own eyes that I have laboured but little and found for myself much serenity. (Sirach 51:26-27)



Thought for the day

The Lord understands us and knows us better than we know ourselves. *O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.* (Psa 139:1-3) He knows of what we are made and so we can come confidently before him with our brokenness and need of his grace. It might be good during Mass today to become aware of whatever is a burden to me now in my life and ask the Lord for his love and healing touch.

Prayer

Lord, you bore the weight of our humanity to come as near to us as possible. Help us to realise you stand beside us and walk with us the journey of life.

Yoke: The metaphor of yoke is used in a very positive way: Lam. 3:27 refers to the yoke as correction administered by God. Even more striking is Jeremiah’s use of the term as a metaphor for God’s authority, probably as expressed in the covenant and the word of God (Jer. 2:20; 5:5).

Jesus’ shorthand use of the term in Matt. 11:28-30 refers to the rabbinic concepts of “the yoke of the kingdom of heaven/Torah/commandments” (cf. Sir. 6:24-30; Pss. Sol. 7:9 *But we (shall be) under Thy yoke for ever, and (under) the rod of your chastening.*

KIND OF WRITING

Part of the Jesus tradition echoes the sapiential or wisdom books of the Bible. In this passage, Jesus, in a prayerful exclamation, acts as the herald of divine wisdom.

Matthew 11-12 have a special structure, laid out in three triads as follows: Mt 11:2-14: Jesus is the Christ; Mt 11:25-12:16: Jesus is the Son, the revealer, the giver of rest; Mt 12:17-50: Jesus is the anointed Servant. Our brief section has three steps: thanksgiving (vv. 25-26); revelation (v. 27) and two invitations and

two promises (vv. 28-30).

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

(i) Connections with Matthew:

V. 25 “Thank” (or literally confess) occurs at the Jordan Matt 3:6; the binomium “heaven and earth” is typical of this Gospel (Matt 5:18; 6:10; 11:25; 16:19; 18:18; 24:30, 35; 28:18); “hidden” is typical Matthew (7-0-3-3; Matt 5:14; 11:25; 13:35, 44; 25:18, 25; Luke 13:21; 18:34; 19:42; John 8:59; 12:36; 19:38); reveal is typical of Matthew and Luke, but curiously rare in John (4-0-5-1). “Infants” comes back in one other place in Matthew, which seems relevant: Matt 21:16 and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’”

V. 28: “Come” in this form is typical of Matthew (6-3-0-2).

V. 29: “Learn” recurs in Matthew (3-1-0-2); “gentle” (= meek) is unique to Matthew (Matt 5:5; 11:29; 21:5).

(ii) Echoes in John

These are very interesting—it might be that in this passage of the historical Jesus we find some of the roots to the special vocabulary and theology of the Fourth Gospel.

V. 27: Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. John 6:46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” John 7:29 Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” John 8:19 ...just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:15 “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. John 17:25

V. 28: John On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me. 7:37 Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away. John 6:37

V. 29: For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. John 13:15 For the love of God is

this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome... 1 John 5:3

ST PAUL

Think about the circumstances of your call, brothers and sisters. Not many were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were born to a privileged position. But God chose what the world thinks foolish to shame the wise, and God chose what the world thinks weak to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, what is regarded as nothing, to set aside what is regarded as something, so that no one can boast in his presence. He is the reason you have a relationship with Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor 1:26–31)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 25 The word used for “thank” is more correctly rendered “confess” or “praise” (NAB “I give praise to you”; NJB “I bless you”). Family language is often used for Jesus’ followers “brothers and sisters”, little ones, children and, here, infants. What things? Surely “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11), including the identity both of John and of Jesus. The word reveal (*apokalyptō*) reminds us that Jesus was an Apocalyptic Jew, like many others, including Paul.

Verse 26 The reversal of human expectations or criteria is found widely in the New Testament. Cf. 1 Cor 1:26–31 above.

Verse 27 This is the verse which most resembles the Fourth Gospel. If it goes back to the historical Jesus—and it may very well—it signals an important moment in his own developing self-awareness. The word *apokalyptō* is used here literally, unveiling or revelation. Cf. Moses knowledge of God in Num 12:8; Ex 33:12-23; Sir 45:1-5. Cf. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18–20)

Verse 28 This verse has had enormous appeal in the spiritual tradition, understandably. The word “rest” is synonymous with salvation (cf. Heb. 3:11; 4:1,

3, 5, 10–11; Rev. 14:13). Contrast: *They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others.* (Matthew 23:4)

Verse 29 Jesus echoes rabbinic tradition here, with the added nuance that his teaching is less “scrupulous” but existentially more challenging.

Verse 30 Easy/light because he had made it so for us. In Jewish tradition, the “yoke” of the Law was always considered a grace. cf. *So that one may first accept upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and afterwards may accept the yoke of the commandments.* (Mishnah, Ber 2:2)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Human beings are always setting up barriers which divide people into those who are important and those who are not. It happens in every community and Jesus met it among the Jewish people of his time. God wants to break down these barriers so that those who are on the wrong side of them can experience that they too are his children and have a unique contribution to make to their community. Perhaps you can recall someone whom you did not think of highly but who turned out to be very good in some sphere. What good news that you were wrong!

2. Great intelligence is not sufficient to develop a relationship with God, unless combined with an open childlike capacity to wonder. Does this resonate with your experience?

3. The ministry of Jesus was to introduce people to a relationship of intimacy with God. How has Jesus given you that kind of relationship?

4. Another aspect of the ministry of Jesus was to free people from the burden of a legalistic understanding of religion, and to introduce them to a faith marked by freedom and love. Perhaps you have made that journey also. Who has been a Jesus person for you and helped you to find freedom, joy and rest in your faith?

PRAYER

Father, Lord of heaven and earth, by whose gracious will the mysteries of the kingdom are revealed to the childlike, make us learn from your Son humility of heart, that in shouldering his yoke we may find refreshment and rest.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

But if Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life because of righteousness

Rom 8:9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness. 11 Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you.

Rom 8:12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh 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.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

For the next couple of Sundays, the second reading is taken from Romans 8, surely the more marvellous page to flow from the pen of Paul. This chapter is Paul's best, fittingly poetic, reflection on the Spirit in our hearts and lives. It richly repays careful reading and prayerful contemplation.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Chapters 5-8 of Romans display all the gifts the Christ-believers in Rome enjoy together without distinction. It is a powerful persuasion, designed to relativise radically and remove the divisions between Gentiles and Jews in the house churches of the capital. Paul presumes the ecstatic experience of the Spirit in prayer and prophecy, as a completely normal part of Christian experience.

KIND OF WRITING

The Letter to the Romans has a fairly clear shape: 1-4 (sin and the need for faith); 5-8 (salvation to all); 9-11 (Jews and Gentiles in God's plan of salvation 12:1-15:6 (how to live together, tolerant and respectfully).

Romans 8 is a climax to the first eight chapters and, in particular, a climax to the second major section of chapters 5-8. Paul uses a range of skills to move the audience and to get them to identify with his teaching about the Holy Spirit, God and Christ. The writing is poetic, using parallelism (both synthetic and antithetic), rhythm, repeated words, like-

sounding words (clearer in Greek), rhetorical questions and even, towards the end, some numerical symbolism (7 for perfection; 10 for completeness). The word "spirit" occurs 21 times (3x7). Frequently, there are smaller climactic effects, building up to the final cry of triumph. It is indeed a powerful passage and it is no wonder that Romans 8 has appealed to so many across the centuries!

Of course, Paul can both delight *and* perplex. At first glance, a basic vocabulary—seemingly simple—recurs: Spirit, law, life, death, we/us, (un)able, children, creation. The tone is emotional, engaging and increasingly triumphant, leading finally to "hyper-victorious" in v. 37. But the apparently simple words combined with rhetoric and poetry make for an intoxicating spiritual cocktail. It can be hard to keep track of what is being addressed and what is being affirmed, even as we are being moved.

It is commonly agreed that Romans 8 unfolds in these broad steps:

- 8:1-17 The Spirit and *life*
- 8:18-30 The Spirit and *hope*
- 8:31-39 God's irrevocable *love* in Jesus

It is more essential than usual for the reader and preacher to read the whole text of Romans 8 in order to make sense of the excerpts offered in the reading. As you read it, you may notice the shifting perspectives of third person (he/she/it), second person (you plural) and first person (we). Also, it is important to remember that, for Paul, flesh does *not* mean body or material reality but rather the mindset which is against God.

Our verses are from the first section vv. 1-17 and the sequences is like this:

- 1-4 God responds to our predicament
- 5-8 Two mind-sets are contrasted
- 9-11 In Christ — our new situation
- 12-17 Consequences of our situation

Our reading offers, therefore, the full subsection vv. 9-11 and the beginning of the exploration of the consequences in vv. 12-17. For the sake of making sense to the ordinary listener, it is always permitted to extend the reading in the liturgy. Here it would make sense to add vv. 14-17 to complete the picture and end on a very positive note.

RELATED PASSAGES

Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God's glory. Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

We know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, in that our gospel did not come to you merely in words, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction (surely you recall the character we displayed when we came among you to help you). (1Thessalonians 1:4-5)

Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things. (1Corinthians 12:4-11)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 9 The opening ("but you") is emphatic, marking a change of perspective. "However" ("but" in Greek) is best understood in the light of the preceding vv. 5-8, which make a strong distinction between two outlooks (lit. mentalities or thinking). "Not in the flesh" clearly does not mean "not in the body", given that the readers are still overground!! Rather it means a whole outlook on life contrary to God. Cf. *For when we were in the flesh, the sinful desires, aroused by the law, were active in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.* (Rom 7:5)

The strong "if indeed" registers a profound assurance and probably should be translated as "given that the Spirit of God dwells in you". The phrases "in

you” and “live” will recur in this chapter. At this point, Paul is probably *not* thinking of individual religious experience but of the gifts of the Spirit *within* the communities or *among* the believers (as in 1 Cor 12 and 14). Cf. *Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?* (1 Cor 3:16)

So far, Paul has been addressing them as you in the plural. In v. 9c, however, he switches to the singular, “if someone”, a kind of general principle and warning. The Greek is strong: such a one *is not of him* (i.e. Christ). Thus the possession of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are the very marks of being Christian.

Verse 10 The opening “if” picks up the reassurance from v. 9ab. The rest of the verse is difficult to understand. Paul can be very compressed in his writing and can presume much; furthermore, there are no verbs in the original Greek. More importantly, the switch from flesh/spirit to body/spirit is unexpected and baffling. What can it mean? It is possible that Paul is looking back to his treatment of baptism in Romans 6. There, we read:

We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.) Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he is never going to die again; death no longer has mastery over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6:6–11)

In this reading, the “body dead” refers not to our actual death but to the destruction of the sinful body in baptism. It is not the materiality of the body which was the problem but sin *in the body*. Hence, “because of sin.” The very tight parallel triads (body-dead-sin and spirit-life-righteousness) are powerful—more powerful, perhaps, to *hearers* of the letter, taking them back to earlier discussions in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. The effects of this new life are manifested in the community through the spiritual gifts, given for the benefit of all, overcoming all judgment and competitiveness.

Verse 11 Paul builds on the previous affirmations to provide a further perspective to this indwelling. The opening “if” makes the link with the preceding thoughts. This verse is also perplexing because the Spirit is not regularly associ-

ated with the resurrection of Jesus. Paul is careful: it is God the Father who brings about the resurrection, through the Spirit.

The “one who raised Jesus for the dead” reflects an early Christian formulation, reflected in Rom 4:24; 6:4; 10:9; Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 1:10; Eh 1:20; Col 2:12; Acts 3:15, 4:10; 13:30 and 1 Pet 1:21. In our verse, the formula is emphatically offered *twice*. Usually, it is read eschatologically but, perhaps, there is more to it. The verb “to make alive” recurs in Paul in contexts meaning both the future and the current life of believers (Rom 4:17; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 3:21). This may explain why he shifts in v. 11 from *dead* bodies to *mortal* bodies. In spite of the adjective, mortal bodies are still alive! Thus Paul has also in mind the current living of the Gospel among the Roman Christians. Cf. *Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect. (Rom 12:1–2)* “Because of righteousness” does not point to our achievement but to the gift of right relationship in Christ, which is poured into our hearts through the Spirit given to us (cf. Romans 5:5).

Verse 12 The “so then” introduces another set of considerations, namely, the consequences for us of our new situation in Christ. This time, the writing is overtly paradoxical. The address (brothers and sisters) speaks to *all* the members, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, of the Roman house and tenement churches. Our being “obligated” is thus a universal Christian outlook and therefore it applies to the Romans Christ believers as well. The very same word was used earlier: *I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. (Rom 1:14)* The word had strong social connotations, expressing the bond of patronage and mutual service. In this case, being “obligated in the flesh” would have a very wide range of meanings, pointing to all one’s social and religious obligations in Roman society in general. Paul underlines the reversal of these obligations in the Christian outlook, which redefined all social obligations, however awkward that may have been. As Romans 13 makes clear, Paul is not saying they should withdraw from society (hardly practicable, in any case) but that they should radically reconfigure their interaction with that wider

society. In this new worldview of the family of the faith, the overarching principles and virtues are mutual love, mutual regard, and mutual service. Cf. *Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. (Rom 13:8)*

Verse 13 With a powerful paradox, Paul challenge them to live with the ultimate considerations of life and death in view. Romans 5:12-21 is behind this advice. There is also an echo of Moses in Deuteronomy: *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live. (Deut 30:19)*

The new way of living is not always the practice of the Romans as we can see from Romans 14. Once again, it can perplex that, in this verse, Paul has replaced *flesh* by *body*. Earlier expressions are recalled: *Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* (Rom 7:24; cf. 6:6). A vast range of actual things the Romans are doing (wrongly) is in mind: cf. Rom 1:29-32, but also misdeeds in chapters 2, 3, 5 and 7. The ongoing struggle (notice the present tense) with the flesh is experienced concretely in the body. This is a battle to the death, and, of course, to life!

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. There is much to reflect upon here: what is my own *fundamental* outlook or mentality? Is it life-giving and according to the Spirit?
2. How do I experience in my daily life the call to faithful discipleship?
3. What difference, spiritually and practically, does the indwelling Spirit make?

PRAYER

Life-giving God, through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, we have been set free—free from the power of sin that leads to death, free to follow the leading of Your Holy Spirit, free to love You with all our heart and soul and strength, free to worship!

May your Holy Spirit inspire our praise and our prayers. Open our hearts and minds to your presence among us and within us, and to the Word You have for us today.

To you alone, life-giving God, belongs all praise and honour and glory and blessing, now and to the end of time. Amen.

Your king comes to you, humble and riding on a donkey

Zech 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
 Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! (3+3)
 Lo, your king comes to you;
 triumphant and victorious is he,(3+3)
 humble and riding on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (3+2)
 10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
 and the war horse from Jerusalem; (3+2)
 and the battle bow shall be cut off,
 and he shall command peace to the nations; (3+3)
 his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
 and from the River to the ends of the earth. (3+3)

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

One word seems to have inspired the use of this reading: humble. The image of universal peace which follows is very attractive in every age. This wider image of peaceful restoration is part of the project of Jesus himself, even if things did not quite work out that way.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

One of the twelve minor prophets, Zechariah was composed during the Persian period, in the aftermath of the Exile. Date: 520-400 BC. The book is in two large sections (1-6 and 7-14), within which other divisions may be identified.

- I. 1-6: Prophetic call and visions
- II. 7-8: from fasts to feasts
- III. 9-11 To restore and purify
- IV. 12-14 Future victory

Part I links penitence to the renewal of the community. Part II takes account of insincere repentance, which delays the promised renewal. Part III names the failure of Davidic leadership and lays the ground for Part IV, a darker section, which nevertheless looks forward to the direct action of YHWH as warrior and king. Our section comes from the start of Part III, in the more positive section.

KIND OF WRITING

This is a prophetic oracle (see v. 1), still looking forward to a restoration under the descendants of David. The only real candidates at the time would have been Zerubbabel (king c. 520-510 BC) and his son-in-law Elthan (king c. 510-490 BC). The section begins in ch. 9 with great hopes but these have evaporated by chapters 12-14.

The form of the oracle is that of an entrance liturgy. The king is coming and so rejoicing is fitting. The king's character is

then described, leading to an idealised picture of great peace, when the instruments of war will be taken away. (Vv. 9-10 have a separate metre and there is a discussion about their place in Zechariah 9 as a whole.)

The oracle respects the parallelism typical of Hebrew poetry and, in fact, each pair of lines is in strict parallel. The rhythm varies somewhat from 3+3 (praise) to 3+2 (lament), as noted in the text above.

RELATED PASSAGES

A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save. (Psalms 33:16-17)

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD. The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. (Psalms 118:22-27)

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 9 This eschatological oracle is one of the most familiar passages from Zechariah. The language echoes other important passages: from the prophets Is 9:6-7, 11:1-5; Mic 5:2-4; from the New Year festival Ps 72:1-11 and 89:38-45); from the promise to Judah: Gen 49:10-11. This kingship language is also, by association, messianic. Hence the acclamations and shouts. Nevertheless, this king is significantly different.

The choice of a donkey is a choice

against militarism, represented by the horse which was not a farm animal at this time. In context, the king arrives after success in Syria, Phoenicia and Philistia, though it is not said that the victory was his. He has three qualities: righteous, saved and humble (not well represented in the NRSV above).

The word "humble" is easily related to poor and means meek and lowly as opposed to than proud and boastful. There may be an echo of Moses, whose mark is meekness (Num 12:3).

Verse 10 There are three themes here.

(i) War and even the semblance of war will be destroyed. Cf. Mic 5:10; Hos 2:20 (Eng. 2:18); Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3; Isa 9:5; Ps 46:9.

(ii) Peace to the nations. Cf. Isa 2:4 and Mic 4:3. Peace, as usual, has richer meanings in Hebrew such as blessing and wholeness.

(iii) YHWH's reign will be truly universal. At this point, the writer ceases reference to Psalm 72 (in which the foes are defeated; see above) and goes on to speak more directly of inclusion.

What is the great river? The Euphrates or more probably the great cosmic sea which nourishes the holy city, as in Ps 46:4, Ezek 47:1 and Zech 14:8.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. There is a note of real joy, even exultation in this first reading. It may help to remember such feelings in your own life—and indeed in your life as a disciple.

2. The contrast between power and humility is strong and this echoes the Pauline theme of power in weakness. Is it your experience that gentleness can be more effective?

3. God's universal reign means all are included without distinction. When has this become evident to you and did you change in any way as a result?

PRAYER

God of all that is, you are all powerful and yet you come to us through Jesus, through the fragility and love of your Son, true God and true Man.

Help us to embrace your humble love of us by living lives of service and humility, modelled on that of Jesus, our messiah.

THE LITURGY

Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 145 (144); Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30

READINGS 1 AND 3

There is no doubt that this text of Zechariah had a tremendous influence on Jesus—underwriting for example his dramatic entry into Jerusalem. The notes of gentleness and peace lie behind this Gospel reading as well and are surely connected with awareness of being a different, unexpected kind of messiah.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 145 (144) takes up the theme of blessing and elaborates on it much more richly. We can see this in phrases such as: *The Lord is faithful in all his words and loving in all his deeds. The Lord supports all who fall and raises all who are bowed down.*

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First Reading

Zechariah 9:9-10

Our first reading should conjure up a memory, an image of Jesus. As the same time, it gives us an insight into God's project of gentle, even vulnerable love.

Second reading

Romans 8:9, 11-13

These few brief sentences take us to the heart of Christian experience and believing, that is, the Spirit dwelling within. As always, the gift has consequences for how we live.

Gospel

Matthew 11:25-30

Our Gospel today is good news at almost any time. Who doesn't need the support and guidance of the saviour? It may help to name for myself whatever is burdening me at the present moment.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 10 July

Genesis 28:10-22

If you close your eyes, a painting might come to mind: this is the story of Jacob's "ladder", which appealed so much to artists. Jacob finds himself between securities, and, as is often the case, he is somehow more open to the divine, the presence of God, as a result.

Matthew 9:18-26

Two stories collide in this reading: Could they be connected? Often we need healing as adults so that the child in us may live again. It might be forgiveness of the simple healing of memory.

Tuesday 11 July

St Benedict, abbot, patron of Europe

Proverbs 2:1-9

For the feast, we interrupt the readings from Genesis (a pity!) and read from Proverbs. Where can we find wisdom, truth, virtue, justice, understanding and fear of the Lord? According to Proverbs—and later according to St Benedict and many other holy men and women—these things are to be found by taking the Word of the Lord to heart.

Matthew 19:27-29

The Gospel—chosen for the feast—is really about those who have followed Jesus in leaving behind all "sensible", "normal" forms of security and happiness for the sake of the Good News.

Wednesday 12 July

Genesis 41:55-57; 42:5-7, 17-24

Joseph had been ditched by his brothers but eventually had come to high office in Egypt. There are lots of ironies in the story as they beg help from the brother they almost murdered. Even at the end, Joseph weeps privately—an unusually intense moment.

Matthew 10:1-7

It can still surprise us that Jesus' original mission was really confined to the people of Israel. Even the symbolism of the Twelve is related to that: these twelve *men* represent the twelve *sons* of Jacob and so the twelve *tribes of Israel*.

Thursday 13 July

St Henry

Genesis 28:10-22

Today we hear one of the most thrilling narratives from the book of Genesis. The unrecognised Joseph interrogates the brothers who caused his exile—so full of pathos and irony that Joseph cannot contain himself. The very last line is immensely forgiving, after all they had done to him.

Matthew 10:7-15

Jesus empowers his apostles with the very same mission he had himself. This entails travelling light, as itinerant preachers. It may also bring rejection as it did for Jesus. The action with the sandals is a prophetic gesture conveying end-time judgement and thus a final appeal not to miss the moment of grace.

Friday 14 July

St Camillus de Lellis

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-30

The story told today is important in the Biblical narrative. Israel—previously known as Jacob—went down to Egypt. Thus began the sojourn that would lead to oppression and eventually to the Exodus. There is a very human touch: Jacob meets the favourite and youngest of his sons, Joseph, whom he had thought to be long dead.

Matthew 10:16-23

In this Gospel, we "overhear" the experiences of the early church, as illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles. Being a disciple and an apostle is not going to be easy, right from the start.

Saturday 15 July

St Bonaventure, doctor

Genesis 49:29-33, 50:15-26

We arrive today at the closure of the book of Genesis with not one but two departures. Jacob, wily old patriarch comes to a pious end; Joseph, beloved son and victim also come to the end of his life. His passing leads to the sojourn of the Israelite in Egypt and so the end of the book of Genesis takes us to the start of the book of Exodus.

Matthew 10:24-33

How do we feel today about being followers of Jesus? Perhaps today's Gospel reading may help. Matthew offers both challenge and reassurance. Challenge: to continue to proclaim, not to be afraid. Reassurance: God's limitless love holds us and protects us. Seeing that a sparrow was the cheapest bird to be bought in the market, there is an element of witty humour in Jesus' teaching.