

## Fourteenth Sunday Ordinary Time – A

[*Zechariah 9: 9-10; Psalm 145; Romans 8: 9, 11-13; Matthew 11: 25-30*]

Over the last few months of physical distancing and working from home, many of us have grown accustomed to the use of online means of communicating. Meetings are held over a variety of videoconferencing platforms, separated family members connect through a smartphone or computer, and the teaching of students has shifted from the classroom to the web. In one sense, we can be grateful that Internet technology keeps us connected; in another, though, our increasing reliance upon it is exposing us to influences that are anything but good. We hear this concern raised most often with respect to the young, but the existence of harmful and divisive currents of thought coursing through cyberspace is something to which people of any age are vulnerable. In point of fact, we are all in many ways suffering from its harmful effects.

It is not uncommon to hear people speak today of anxiety, frustration and impatience arising from watching the news, scanning their social media feeds, or following the latest gossip. There is so much happening, and so much chatter, that it is difficult really to know how to make sense of it all, to know what is right and not. This leaves us feeling very restless.

Widespread individual angst is causing broad social unrest. Anger abounds. Calm and respectful argument has given way to loud and disparaging quarrel. Careful thought is replaced by a careless tweet. Measured response loses ground to emotive reaction. People of like minds speak only to one another and close themselves from consideration of other viewpoints. As a society we are increasingly marked more by division than unity, by isolation than collaboration, which leaves us confused and worried.

What are we to do about this? Well, when we turn to the Gospel we find the answer. To move away from restlessness and anxiety, and from all its harmful collateral effects, we need to accept an invitation. “Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” With these words, Jesus invites us to come and receive from him freedom not only from the burdens that life inevitably imposes, but also those heavy weights of worry, fear and confusion that we place upon ourselves. He wants to lift it all from our shoulders and replace it with that for which the human heart always yearns and which has become an urgent need in our day: rest, the inner tranquility and peace that can abide even in the midst of external turbulence, what Jesus more fully calls rest for the soul. Jesus invites us to himself so that this great gift, which we both need and want, can be ours. Then he continues to explain how we accept his invitation.

“Take my yoke upon you,” he says. “Yoke” is a biblical metaphor for religious instruction in the ways and commandments of God. Here our Lord is saying, “if you want interior peace, accept my teaching.” Right away this awakens us to the realization that how we are feeling within relates directly to what we are being taught. If we are experiencing restlessness and angst, then we need to take a second look at the “instruction” we receive through the newsfeeds, the TV and radio programming, the podcasts and the social media sites that regularly draw and capture our attention. These are providing the “teachings” that are leaving people anxious and afraid. These are giving the “instructions” that are splintering society. Only by taking on the yoke of Christ, only by accepting his instruction, can restlessness of spirit be transformed into rest of soul.

Then we hear Jesus say this: “learn from me.” These words alert us to the important place we give to personalities in our learning. Our society is marked by a cult of celebrity. For some reason we are ready to allow stars from the worlds of sport, TV, music, cinema and YouTube to influence the way we think. This is why commercial advertisers and social movements rely heavily on celebrity endorsement to promote their messages. But this, too, can augment our inner turmoil, since the attempt to emulate many of today’s lifestyle models is to accept the impossible burden of unrealistic expectation and to follow the path of false hope. Jesus directs us away from all that, and moves us in the direction of peace, when he says: “learn from me.” He is inviting us to study not just his teaching but also him, to learn from his example and adopt him as our model for right living.

When we do look to Jesus, we see the one who lived as we earnestly want to be able to live. Jesus was surrounded not only by religious and political unrest but also by powerful obstacles to his ministry and real threats to his life. Yet, this external turbulence could in no way shake his inner rest. He himself identifies the key to his peace when he says this: “for I am gentle and humble of heart.” The gentleness and humility of our Lord expressed his total and unconditional trust in the love of the Father. From that trust he placed his entire life in the hands of the Father, who he knew would rescue him from all harm. That humble trust was rewarded when, as St. Paul recalls, the Father raised him from the dead by the power of the Spirit, the definitive victory over all that is evil. Here we see the meaning of Zechariah’s prophecy that the king to come would be victorious, precisely because of his humility.

Learning from Jesus, we see that peace of heart is born of a humble trust in the Father’s ever-victorious love. That peace will come, then, when we cease acting like the “learned and clever” criticized by Jesus, when we stop, in other words, arrogantly privileging worldly wisdom over the instruction of Christ, when we cease to prefer our own thoughts to the teaching of our Lord, and when we decide, once and for all, to choose as our one necessary teacher Jesus, who, as the Son of God, is the only one who can reveal the Father to us. The path that leads to inner peace is that of humility, which is to say, the humble acceptance of Christ’s teaching and example, that in turn move us to humble trust in the love of the Father. Jesus is the only teacher we need. So, let’s pray for the grace to accept humbly his invitation to come to him and learn from him to trust the Father, and so receive the gift of rest for our souls.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith  
St. Joseph’s Basilica  
July 5, 2020