

Fr James' homily for the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Zechariah 9:9-10
Second Reading: Romans 8:9-13
Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30



Rebuilding the rubble

Many have the chance to return today to participation at Mass “in the flesh”. I like to think of them carrying their prayers and intentions like precious gifts to lay before the altar and to unite to the sacrifice of Christ. Perhaps too they will be returning to Holy Communion, making actual all those acts of Contrition and Spiritual Communion of the last months. The guidelines for the celebration of Mass in these circumstances call for brevity, so it is good we have succinct scriptures today. Brief, but powerful.

The prophet Zechariah calls to us today in evocative, beautiful words. Although one of the minor prophets, he speaks with great significance after the return of Israel from exile - and that maybe speaks to us in a special way at this time. He speaks to Israel of how to rebuild a destitute Jerusalem. He gives a vision of salvation amidst the rubble. Israel has been given the mission to know the mind and heart of God and bring all the nations of the Earth together. Sitting amidst the wreckage of Jerusalem they must have wondered where to start, or if it were really true.

I sympathise rather. In these tense frustrating and still scary Covid days, we feel overrun. Disorientated. Where do we start to rebuild the life of the Church? How do we fulfil our mission? Into these feelings Zechariah brings his prophetic image of the true king, the new David who will bring the peoples together - but whose victory is seen in his humble riding upon a donkey. Needless to say, the image of Palm Sunday comes straight into our minds, as it is supposed to. All scripture, our faith tells us, is about Jesus, and here he is. I hope that as you all make it possible for others to come to Mass in the flesh in the coming weeks, and they make it possible for you, so when in leaving church by the one-way system you joyfully take a Palm Cross - blessed this year in isolation and exile - you will know how in Jesus the King the rubble of our lives is constantly rebuilt.

The prophet lists all the instruments of chaos: bows; chariots and horses - for which we might read respirators, lockdown, grief for lost life and livelihood - and in place he offers a kingdom of reconciliation and harmony. This was an unlikely vision in the rubble of Jerusalem, but encouragement for us in the chaos of Covid. Jesus points to himself as the kingdom come, and St Paul today reminds us of the same - if we follow his humble paradoxical pathway today then we will truly live and his kingdom is already here.

And so briefly to that familiar Gospel image of taking on the yoke of Christ. Again Jesus talks of the paradox of following him: “Put *my* yoke on your back, shoulder *this* burden, and you find yourself at rest and free”. You could remake that sentence many ways: For example: “Take on the hassle of making worship available for others, and you will savour the sweetness of Mass yourselves all the more”. Jesus asks us to be childlike: and as always we need to remind ourselves that this doesn’t mean our faith is kids’ stuff, but in fact that it calls for a real maturity: to be those not invested in any other egotistical agenda but just interested in serving him.

Jesus ultimately will proclaim his Kingdom from the Cross, where his enemies put the very title above him. Truly, his kingdom, the Church, stretches from sea to sea. At present she looks very weak: the ways of faith and the lives of parishes are in fairly tumbledown state. But Christ is risen! So what will we rebuild? The foundations are there to lay for each of us in renewing our commitment to the call of our faith, to knowing it and knowing and trusting the promises of our gentle, humble King. Rebuilding the rubble of my soul is a never-ending task, but the only truly worthwhile task to undertake. Let Jesus the King ride through the gate of your soul today.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.