

Sunday 14

When you heard the first reading today, you might have thought that someone had not turned the page, that there was a mistake, for the reading about the king coming in to Jerusalem on a donkey is, in our thoughts, the reading for Palm Sunday when Jesus enters Jerusalem. But there it is for us on this 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of ordinary time. And then our next question might be: “What does this reading have to do with today’s Gospel in which Jesus praises his Father for having revealed his thoughts to the little ones while hiding them from the wise and the learned?” The connecting point might be summed up in the word humility. The king who comes on a donkey and not on a horse is a king who seeks to rule by good will and not by force. The horse and the chariot were instruments of war; the donkey, on the other hand, is an instrument of peace. Those who make war are the powerful ones; those who pursue peace are often the little ones who, like Jesus, ride donkeys. And Jesus praises them in this Gospel.

Our second reading today from Romans contrasts two different ways of living which Paul identifies as life in the flesh and life in the spirit. Life in the flesh is the life lived in opposition to God’s laws; life in the Spirit is its opposite: the life lived in obedience to God’s law. And for us Christians life in the spirit means a life

following King Jesus in his humility and peacefulness. In the letters of Paul there are often descriptions of what these two kinds of life look like concretely. For example, in the Letter to the Colossians, ch. 3, we are admonished to put to death the parts of ourselves that are earthly, that is, immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, the greed that is idolatry, anger, fury, malice, slander obscene language, and lying to one another. We are to replace these bad characteristics with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and, in one word, love, which is the bond of perfection. And in Philippians, ch. 4, Paul writes in a general and lyrical way: “Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Then the God of peace will be with you.”

So we have an idea of what life in the flesh and life in the spirit are. Indeed we know them in our hearts. We live in the Holy Spirit and that Spirit gives us a sense for what belongs to what in our lives. The Spirit’s prompting to us are as natural to us as a bat is to a ballplayer.

In both our individual lives and in our life as a community different elements of these diverse ways of living come to the fore at different times. Therefore, there is need for discernment in our lives. Each of us has to attempt to listen to his or her heart, for there the Holy Spirit speaks to us. However, if we are going to do that, we need to have some time for silence and quiet in our lives so that we can detect God's whispering to us.

But God's whispering to us as a church, as a community, can become quite loud at times, for we believe that God speaks to us through our pope and bishops and through events taking place in our world. For we are the little ones to whom Christ reveals his Father. We are the ones called to bear the yoke of Jesus in our personal and ecclesial lives. And we are promised rest if we do so. The biblical commentator William Barclay recalls a legend which claimed that over Jesus' carpenter shop in Nazareth a sign read: "My yokes fit well." Ox yokes were made of wood at that time and carefully fitted to the ox's neck so that they would not harm it. So too we believe that the Lord's grace fits out burdens to our backs.

The whispering we hear from the pope today is care for the immigrant and care for our planet. Are we listening?

A whispering which has accompanied us now for many years has grown louder in the last few weeks because of the actions of Kim Jong Un, the president of North Korea. Fifty-two years ago at the Second Vatican Council, in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church entitled *Gaudium et Spes*, *The Joy and Hope of the world*, these words were written: “Therefore, it must be said again: the arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which injures the poor to an intolerable degree. It is much to be feared that if this race persists, it will eventually spawn all the lethal ruin whose path it is now making ready.

This past Friday a 10 page treaty which would ban nuclear weapons was accepted by 122 nations, two-thirds of the 192 members of the United Nations. The nine countries which already possess nuclear weapons refuse to support it. But those who support it see it as a step forward. Past treaties that banned biological and chemical arms have made these weapons widely, if not yet universally, unacceptable. This treaty hopes to do the same with respect to nuclear weapons.

May we find rest for our souls by remaining part of the little ones, by taking the Lord’s yoke upon us, by riding our donkeys.

