

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Zechariah 9:9-10

Psalms 144

Romans 8:9, 11-13

Matthew 11:25-30

In our Gospel passage we hear Jesus *exclaim*, “I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do.”

This is perhaps a good opportunity to briefly note the message we’ve included in the bulletin the last couple of weeks – namely, that the Lord’s house is a place where children are welcome. As Jesus said in another place, “Do not stop the little children from coming to me, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.” (Matt 19:14)

Now I certainly understand the desire to maintain a prayerful and respectful atmosphere as we celebrate the holy mysteries of our religion—I seek this myself—but this doesn’t mean that our church needs to be antiseptic. We are pro-life after all, and life is sometimes a bit messy! I for one would much rather have a parish with many children—a parish overflowing with life—than one with hardly anyone under the age of 50.

So dear parents, please do not be embarrassed to bring your children to Mass. We want them to get in the habit of it! Yes, we have the family room as an option if you want to use it, but don’t feel like you *have* to go there. Feel free to duck out for a few minutes if you need to, and take as long as you need, but please come back when you’re able.

And everyone else, please join me in welcoming young families to our growing parish. And let’s do our best to offer a good example for our youngest parishioners—both in how we pray, and in how we live out our Christian charity—mindful that children so often learn most by imitation.

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After this, Jesus offers an invitation to his weary listeners: “Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart...”

I’m sure you can all think of a time when you’ve had a boss or a teacher or a coach or some other authority figure who you’ve thought was no good. Maybe it was a parent. Maybe it was a priest! Whoever it was, for some reason you found it hard to trust or respect them. Maybe they wore their authority too heavy; maybe you thought they were irresponsible or their judgment was poor; maybe you thought they were just self-centred and using you for their own purposes. Whatever it might be, we can all

probably think of situations like this – where, if there was no choice but to play along, we just had to get on with it and make the best of a bad situation. They’re the boss, and there’s no getting around it – but they’re a lousy boss.

On the flip side, hopefully you’ve all had situations where the opposite was true – where you’ve had a person in authority who you really respected, and who you were glad to work with. You could see they had worthy goals in mind, and that they treated everyone with dignity in pursuit of those goals. If they ever had to correct you, it was done fairly, and deep down you knew that the correction was actually for your own good.

Well, to cut to the chase, in this Gospel passage Jesus is essentially saying that he’s like this ideal boss. He doesn’t deny his authority – but he is *gentle*, and *humble*. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

So let’s break this down a little bit. Firstly, what are we to make of the fact that Jesus Christ—the second Person of the Blessed Trinity—says, “I am gentle and humble of heart”? Some translations say, “*meek* and humble of heart.”

Well for starters, gentleness / meekness is not about being a doormat. Meekness is the virtue opposed to the vice of anger. It’s about having self-control, and not flying off the handle and seeking vindication when we perceive that we’ve been injured or insulted. Meekness is about being able to handle all the annoying stuff life throws at us with equanimity, because we know there’s a bigger picture in play.

Take one look at the cross and it’s obvious that Jesus is the perfect example of absorbing insults and injuries for the sake of a bigger picture – namely, our salvation.

It’s for our immense benefit that God is meek and gentle, because—let’s be honest—we know we’re not perfect. Just like the Apostles during Jesus’ public ministry, we constantly mess up and miss the point. And if God flew off the handle every time we stuffed up? Well, we wouldn’t survive very long.

Make no mistake, Jesus is strong and decisive – but he’s not showy about it. It’s a quiet, loving strength that builds up rather than tears down.

So Jesus is meek and gentle. He’s also *humble*.

Humility is not about walking around hanging our head and beating ourselves up all day. That’s self-loathing. Humility is a willingness to lead a life in accordance with the truth, and not judging ourselves greater than we are. Humility is about *truth* – the truth that we’re not God, *and that God is*. Humility stops us from placing our hope in ourselves, and helps us to direct it where it belongs – to place our hope in God.

So humility looks different for Jesus than it does for us, because he’s God and we’re not. Jesus *is* the truth—as he says, he’s the way, the truth, and the life—and so by

definition he *is* humility, because humility is about truth. But he also models for us human humility, in his continual submission to the will of the Father. Jesus Christ is the one through whom all things were made, and yet his whole life on earth was a complete giving of himself to the Father's will – perfect submission and perfect humility.

So Jesus is meek, and he's humble of heart. In other words, *we can trust him* – he's the kind of authority figure we all yearn for.

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Next, Jesus says that his yoke is easy and his burden light. It's an interesting image.

For those city-slickers who are too removed from the knowledge of old-school farming techniques, a yoke is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the necks of two animals to help them pull either a plough or a cart that is too heavy for humans to carry.

So again, he doesn't deny his authority, or the reality of our situation. There *is* a yoke involved – but that's just the human condition.

You know, we humans strive after independence, and we think freedom consists of having no master. But let's be honest – so many folks who think they are free and independent are really slaves to an unseen master—slaves to their desires, slaves to their addictions, slaves to sin—in essence, they're slaves to the evil one.

We can never be truly independent. “No man is an island,” as the poet John Donne famously said. We always have a yoke – we always have a master. To quote Bob Dylan, “You gotta serve *somebody*.” And given this, as King David once concluded, it is far better to fall into the power of the living God—whose mercy is great—than to fall into the power of men.

Real freedom isn't the absence of any and all restrictions – the ability to do whatever we feel like, consequences be damned. Real freedom isn't freedom *from* – it's freedom *for*. It's the freedom to pursue the good, the true and the beautiful. It's the freedom to please God. True freedom comes from serving the one whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light – the one who is truly just – the one who created us, and who knows what is for our good better than we do.

And so our true joy will come from pursuing the Lord's will for our lives, despite the difficulties involved.

When we seek after pleasure, there is a kind of happiness that comes, but it is fleeting – it doesn't last. We may enjoy eating the greasy hamburger, but it isn't long before that good feeling gives way... for starters, it might give way to a feeling of indigestion!

But there is *also* a kind of delight that comes from performing acts of virtue – and this is a joy that *lasts*. When we strive after something that’s difficult—but we know that it’s good and worth striving after—there’s a real sense of satisfaction and joy when we achieve it. I’m sure you’ve all experienced this. Doing things objectively good and virtuous have a way of making us feel good. As so many of the saints have said, *if you want to feel good, be good*. Let me say that again – if you want to feel good, *be good*.

Now of course, the life of a committed Christian is not simply an endless “nice feelings” party – there are implications to the Christian life that can be tough to live out. The Lord’s yoke is easy and his burden light, not because it is undemanding, but because *it is what we most want*. It is *real*, and it is what gives meaning to the mixed-up jumble of our lives. Underneath all our compromises and hardness of heart, there is a little flicker that has always said “yes” to God. Deep down in our heart of hearts we know that what God wants for us is we most want for ourselves.

So trust in the Lord, and give your whole heart to him. For he is gentle and humble of heart – and his yoke is easy, and his burden light.