

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Zechariah 9:9-10 / Matthew 11:25-30)
09.07.2017
Humility

Dear brothers and sisters,

Both readings that we have just heard speak of humility.

The Prophet Zechariah describes the coming of the Messianic King with these words:

“See now, your king comes to you;
he is victorious, he is triumphant,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey”.

‘Riding on a donkey’ is not the way for a king to go about; a king rides on a horse or stands on a horse-drawn chariot. ‘Riding on a donkey’ was the humble way used by princes in the Bible. Jesus is seen to fulfil Zechariah’s prophecy with his entry into Jerusalem. Jesus was the King of Israel, the Messiah foretold and awaited by the prophets, but his kingship was not like the kingships of this world. Humility was its hallmark. Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

In today’s gospel passage, we are reminded that the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are revealed to mere children, while hidden from the learned and the clever. Only the humble of heart can receive and understand the mysteries of God’s kingdom. We are reminded also that Jesus’ heart is gentle and humble. His humility gives rest to those who need it and we all need it. Humble persons give rest to those who meet them.

Humility is not a popular virtue. We prefer to be in control and dominate. Power and success are more attractive than humility. It is easy to understand why careerism is more attractive than service for so many people. Nevertheless we are called to be humble because Jesus was humble. We are called to be humble in the same way that Jesus was.

We might ask ourselves: What is humility? How can we be humble?

Humility is not a sign of weakness, but a virtue which requires much determination and strength from us. To catch a glimpse of what humility is like, let us look at Jesus who was humble of heart.

Jesus came to reveal the Father’s love for all. Jesus did this not by imposing his message but by humbly proposing it to them. It was up to his listeners to receive his message or not. In the same way it is left to us to receive it today. Jesus respects our freedom. Jesus always leaves open the possibility for us to refuse his message. This speaks volume about Jesus’ humility, his respect for us. We know by experience how difficult it is to respect the freedom of others, especially when their values are not our values. We know by experience how difficult it is to be humble. How many parents are disorientated by religious, moral, and human choices made by their children, when they choose not to follow the way of their parents! For these parents, to be humble is at one and the same time to be true with their children and to love them with their differences. The way

forward is to respect others and that is not always an easy path to walk when there are disagreements between us.

Jesus preached not his own thoughts but what his Father inspired him to preach. He received from the Father the words he was called to preach during these times he gave to solitary prayer, early morning or late at night. To be humble is to consent to be simply a channel between God and others. When we are humble, our reference point is not ourselves, but God and others. We receive our lives from God and our lives are to be used for the good of others. To understand this is to be situated in a humble attitude of heart.

Jesus healed the sick and fed the crowds not by his own power but by the power of His Father acting through him. By being human and compassionate with those who listened to him, healing them and nourishing them in the name of his Father, Jesus revealed the Father's humanity and compassion for his people. By his humility, Jesus was really the mediator between His heavenly Father and his people. So too, we are called to be mediator of God's compassion for our brothers and sisters in humanity by our humility, by allowing God to work through us.

At the end of his life on earth, Jesus saved the world not by his own power and strength, but by his Passion. He went through his Passion in a humble and submitted way, by consenting to what was happening to him. He saved the world not by what he was doing, but by the way he consented to what was happening to him. He lived through his passion with a loving and forgiving heart for all, his enemies included, and not with a heart filled with anger, violence, or the spirit of revenge. Indeed Jesus' humility was not a sign of his weakness, but required of him determination and energy. We are called to be humble as Jesus was humble, to go through life with a pure heart, a heart filled with love and forgiveness, love for God and loving forgiveness for everybody else. We are called to have hearts purified from all seeds of anger, violence and the spirit of revenge.

To conclude, let us look at St Benedict for an instant. Chapter seven of his Rule for monks, entitled "On humility", is the longest chapter of the Rule: that is to say the importance of humility for St Benedict. In the first degree of humility, Benedict reminds us that to be humble is never to forget Christ; it is to always remember Christ, to be aware of his presence, his teaching, his saving action in our lives. Busy with ourselves as we so often are, we can so easily forget the presence of God within us and between us. St Benedict invites us not to become prisoners, slaves of ourselves, but to think of God and of others in order to respect and serve them. St Benedict invites us not to be prisoners of our selfish interests but to have at heart the common good. This is humility. This too requires of us a lot of courage.

The twelfth and last degree of humility for Benedict is illustrated by the image of the Publican praying with downcast eyes and saying: "Lord, I am a sinner, not worthy to look up to heaven." The attitude of the Publican with God is the right one. The right attitude of every person in presence of God is humility, allowing God to be God, Creator and Saviour, and human to be human, sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation.

May the Lord grant us the grace of a humble heart, a heart like that of Jesus, a heart like the Publican's heart!