

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Zechariah 9:9-10 / Matthew 11:25-30)
05.07.2020
God's ways are not our ways

If we want to sum up the message of our two readings today, we can quote the Lord himself who declares in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (55:8).

Both God's prophetic word in our first reading and Jesus' words in the Gospel make very challenging statements.

God tells us that his victor humbly rides on a donkey and heralds a message of true and lasting peace. He stresses that his victory has nothing to do with violence and coercion because he has banished and destroyed chariots and bows of war.

This is certainly not how we envisage victory. Too often we feel that we need to have recourse to violence in order to deal with conflicts in our societies; too often, in our workplaces, envy makes our competitions quite nasty. In order to enjoy our victory we seem to feel compelled to humiliate our fellow competitors. The idea that winners can be humble about their victory, that it is possible for them to be non-violent in the way they deal with others are not really our way of seeing things but this is God's way of seeing them.

The Gospels and the best of our Christian spiritual traditions agree on the fact that violence, pride and humiliation cannot bring peace, peace in the world, peace in our Churches and peace in our hearts.

To the violence that we see in armed conflicts or in physical combat we must add the violence manifested by harsh words and the violence of institutionalised discrimination. The bows of war mentioned in the book of the prophet Zechariah can shoot arrows of lies or derogatory hate speech or arrows of complicit silence and laziness.

This is not the way God invites us "to fight the good fight" (1Tim 6:12). Peace is brought about and we are all victors, when we "show solidarity and rise above self-interest" (Pope Francis, *Message*, 01.01.2016).

Ours is a victorious Lord who condemns all forms of violence and establishes peace. That is quite a challenging statement!

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is also quite challenging: the rest he offers us consists in shouldering his yoke which is, according to him, light and easy.

Once again, God's ways are not ours. The strange thing is that we often prefer to shoulder yokes that are not Christ's and which end up being heavy to carry!

Too often we allow ourselves to be burdened by thoughts, expectations, decisions and addictions which deepen and increase an unhealthy restlessness, a perpetual inner dissatisfaction and which disconnect us from who we truly are, as well as from others and from God.

We want to be in charge. We think that we know what we need and we want to find it by ourselves.

The image of the yoke reminds us that we have a radical need for somebody else to lead and guide us on the right path. Left to ourselves, we get lost, we do not remain on the right track.

The first Christians were known as the people of the Way (cf. Ac 9:2) because they belonged to the Lord who is the way (cf. Jn 14:6) not because they did things their way!

Today our two readings warn us that we have to be careful not to embrace the way of the world – *the world* here meaning all that is opposed to God, both outside and within ourselves. The Church as a whole and each one of us has received a mandate to bear witness to Christ's way of being human, to Christ as the way for us to become more human. We are supposed to be heralds of Christ who is our peace and in whom is our rest.

Our societies and Churches are going through a difficult time, we are all tempted to withdraw into safe bubbles, to protect ourselves by erecting mental or physical walls, by developing besieged mentalities where others who think differently are considered to be threats.

At the moment, unfortunately, there are many Catholics who endorse conspiracy theories and fifth column theories, there are Christians who long to establish different kinds of ghetto Churches. Their ways are not God's ways.

Pope Francis reminded us that “a moment of crisis is a moment of choice, it is a moment that places us before the decisions that we must make” (*Homily*, 02.05.2020). Clearly for us Christians the choice is between clinging to our own way, a narrow, fearful and self-centred way or embracing Christ's way, a humble, loving, caring and life-giving way. The challenge is, according to St Paul, to reject the former way of life, our old self and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, to clothe ourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (cf. Eph 4:22-24).

Moments of crisis are also moments of conversion, which are meant to “inspire some kind of change for the better” (Pope Francis, Id.). These past weeks, many people asked me: “Do you think that after the pandemic things will be different, and we will be changed?” My answer was always the same: “Things will be different only if we work for them to change, we will be different only if we are ready to change something in the way we relate to one another, to the material world which surrounds us and to the whole of creation.”

Crises may bring forth the best and the worst. What way are we going to choose, what decision are we going to make, where are we going to find inspiration and purpose? In our fears and pride, in our self-centred way or in God's way as we see it revealed in Jesus Christ?

Let us heed the Lord's call to turn from our ways so that we may live and become seeds of life and peace there where the Lord has planted us.