



“Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, Meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass”

(Zechariah 9:9).

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
July 6th, 2014

First Reading: Zechariah 9:9-10

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem;
and the battle-bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Responsorial Psalm: 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14

Lector: ¹ I will extol you, my God and King,
All: and bless your name for ever and ever.
Lector: ² Every day I will bless you,
All: and praise your name for ever and ever.
Lector: ³ Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
All: his greatness is unsearchable.
Lector: ⁴ One generation shall laud your works to another,
All: and shall declare your mighty acts.
Lector: ⁵ On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
All: and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
Lector: ⁶ The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
All: and I will declare your greatness.
Lector: ⁷ They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
All: and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
Lector: ⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful,
All: slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Lector: ⁹ The Lord is good to all,
All: and his compassion is over all that he has made.
Lector: ¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
All: and all your faithful shall bless you.
Lector: ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
All: and tell of your power,
Lector: ¹² to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
All: and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Lector: ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
All: and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Lector: The Lord is faithful in all his words,

All: and gracious in all his deeds.

Lector:¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling,

All: and raises up all who are bowed down.

Second Reading: Romans 8:9, 11-13

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹

⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30

25 At that time Jesus said, *'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;*

²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Homily

If we came out of a more conservative evangelical or Catholic background, we may sigh and moan when we read the words of St. Paul, as the terms, "body," "spirit," "flesh" have taken on meanings through our various traditions that were not found in the original Greek language. So, let us first examine these terms.

Paul has been pegged as suspicious and hostile in some ways toward the body. **"Body"** in this passage is not a term separating body from soul, but refers to the whole person who is subject to sin and who is also open to redemption.

There is a "lower nature" not subject to redemption that is the same as that of animals or what some have termed, the "reptilian brain," e.g. the basic deep brain components that keep us alive, breathing, blood circulating, digesting, and which will mindlessly and reflexively respond to noxious stimuli from the outside world with "fight" or "flight." This

part of us does not require redemption, because it is simply basic biology. But "body" in the biblical sense is more than a biological "lower nature" or "animal nature."

When I say this part of us does not require redemption, I can't help but smile because I am reminded of what transpired several years ago at St. Junia's House during the Mass. A little dog who used to live here, Booby, wandered in to the service when we were receiving communion. She seemed very interested and I am sure couldn't understand why she was left out. (Booby never wanted to be left out where food is concerned!) We had just finished saying that communion is open to everyone, regardless of the church they come from. So I smiled and commented that Booby didn't require redemption, that she is who she is and an entirely perfect little being. She has not done and is not capable of doing anything from which she must be redeemed.

But we have a higher mind that can allow us to make choices to continue or to put the brakes on a purely animal level act. Similarly, we know that as human beings, we can allow ourselves to fall to the level of an animal, devoid of true humanity by failing to override that animal level when we have the ability to do so. If there is no capacity to choose or for putting on the brakes, then we are mere animals. If we have the capacity to put on the brakes, then we are not mere animals. We may respond as animals when we fail to stop, when we do have the capacity to stop and choose not to do so -- then we've "fallen" to that lower level.

"Body" and "flesh" are not synonymous terms as they are used in scripture, and this is where in our times, we have tended to become confused and to think that we are being asked to denigrate and deny our physicality. No!

Flesh, or in Greek *sarx*, if left to itself is a drive to maintain or enhance ourselves at the expense of others. But it does not refer simply to *soma*, or the body, or bodily functions. When *sarx* is taken to mean only a lower nature, this is actually not a biblical idea, but was a Greek concept. *Sarx* is our unredeemed nature, which includes aspects of our psyches that would be considered "higher brain." Flesh includes that part of us that has the capacity to make choices, or what Paul termed "mind of the flesh." So living in the flesh does not mean merely something physical. Of course, it can include what we do with our bodies if we misuse them or disrespect our own bodies or those of others. And obviously we may carry out many kinds of evil deeds or wrong doing using our bodies to accomplish such goals. *Sarx* is like the world in Romans and Galatians. *Sarx* has to do with the part of us that requires redemption because when we are in the flesh, we are thinking of ourselves at the expense of others, and we may even use higher brain processes to accomplish such goals, using our intellectual capacities in an entirely self-serving way. But we should also note that rationality or reason alone will not spare us from the deadly *sarx* closed in on itself. Now what Paul says should make more sense: "If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death the evil deeds of the body, you will live." He is not saying that living in our

bodies is a bad thing. He is saying that if our mind is focused on self-serving which could mean physically, mentally, or spiritually, then we will die.

If we believe in the Incarnation, we cannot reject our physicality: It is an important part of us, but not one to which we are bound – we may choose to incorporate it and integrate it into our awareness and our spirituality.

Hopefully, with these issues clarified, we will open ourselves to better understand today's Gospel. We need not encumber ourselves with the burdens and rules coming from our own culture or those of an earlier time which we are incapable of following or living up to. As Fr. Ron Rolheiser has said, Jesus extends an invitation into a deeper virtue.¹ Jesus invites us beyond animal instinct, natural reactions, looking out for number one, reprisals, tit-for-tat or eye-for-an-eye, legal rigidities, self-righteousness, and beyond virtues defined by external rules. As we come into relationship with him, we will find Christ's wisdom and his fullness is gentle. In him we will find that these responses which are all burdens will drop away.

The first three verses from the Gospel reading are also found in Luke, probably coming from a common early source out of an early oral tradition. It looks so similar to what we often see in the prayers of the 4th Gospel regarding how the Father and Son have knowledge of one another. It is likely an early liturgical fragment that was orally passed down to the Gospel writers.

And the second half of the Gospel reading is similar to a shorter form which also was possibly earlier from the Gospel of Thomas which read: "Jesus said: ***'Come to me, for easy is my yoke and my Lordship is gentle, and you shall find repose for yourselves.'***" Here, Jesus' saying is also similar to the invitation found in one of the wisdom books, Sirach 51:23-26. We are instructed that wisdom's yoke can be found close by, if we open ourselves to the risk of learning.

²³ Draw near to me, you who are uneducated,
and lodge in the house of instruction.

²⁴ Why do you say you are lacking in these things,
and why do you endure such great thirst?

²⁵ I opened my mouth and said,
Acquire wisdom for yourselves without money.

²⁶ Put your neck under her yoke,
and let your souls receive instruction;
it is to be found close by.

Now what did "yoke" mean in Jesus' time? All the common folks were bound to something that controlled their lives, such as tenant farmers who were subject to the wills of their landowners, or controlled by religious leaders who hoarded the Temple tithes that were extracted from everyone, growing fat off the backs of the people rather than redistributing the wealth to the needy. These leaders also burdened the people with hundreds of rules and commandments purportedly required by God. And we have

¹ Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: An Invitation to a Deeper Virtue*, St. Louis website, 7/3/11.

yokes in our own day, although we may not use this term any more. But metaphorically, it describes anything that controls the lives of people. Each generation seems to manufacture them, creating more "have-tos" or "shoulds" or "musts" that offer little insight into knowing God or provide little help in living honorably and ethically.

Jesus reverses all the usual rules and practices. He thanks God for hiding this spiritual reality from those who are wise and intelligent, who try to solve it all for themselves, as contrasted to Jesus bringing his spiritual clarity to infants. Does this mean that he is denigrating intelligence or education? No, not at all, but he is saying that spiritual relationship with God will not come to those who rely on their own capabilities. The reference to infancy suggests those who are vulnerable, and open to teaching and instruction. We will learn from Jesus who teaches us how he lived through suffering, through taking on the burdens of others, through acceptance of pain. And in him our own pain will be transformed. May we offer him our entire selves and accept his yoke and remove the millstones from our necks.

*"Christ
came that
The Bread might hunger
that The Fountain might thirst
that The Way might be tired on his journey,
that The Truth might be accused of false witness,
that The Healer might be
wounded."*

*Lord,
make us hunger;
teach us how to thirst for you;
let us know how the easy Way, got tired,
and was accused,*

and let us be one with you. Amen.

Quote is from St. Augustine

Prayer only. Copied by
permission

Copyright © 2011, The Center for Liturgy at Saint Louis University. All rights reserved.
Permission is hereby granted to reproduce for personal or parish use