

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 5, 2020

Recently I visited with some longtime friends who are strong and faithful Catholics. During the visit I heard concern, worry, confusion, frustration, stress, questions and fear; all about the days we are in and in our future. I understood where they were as I was relating with them. Maybe you too can relate with these faithful brothers and sisters; you share some of the same feelings.

Who are the burdened of today? We are. We can think about the many people Jesus ministered to in His days. People in Jesus' time had many burdens -- it was hard to make a living. Survival was for the fittest. Poverty and disease were everywhere. Government and military oppression was evident. Injustice was rampant. Religious factions were in every town. Even though it sounds a lot like today, we must admit we do have it much better today in many ways than in ancient times.

This is not to undermine our current day burdens. There is a heavy oppression on many, and this current pandemic and social unrest has us all on edge. These times are weighing on us all.

Whether our burdens are ancient or of present days, Jesus invites all who are weary and burdened down to come to Him. The struggle is how do we do this?

The problem that I see in myself, my friends, and many is that when we are stressed out, it is difficult to listen to the Lord and hold onto faith. It is a struggle to pray. When you are truly exhausted and stressed don't you find it difficult to pray?

The lifting up of heart and mind is hard when there seems to be a race going on within. This is when doubt becomes strong and worries are many.

However, we know having something to believe in is essential and finding comfort in faith can be a good start. Faith says to us, hang in there because God is doing something we cannot see yet! If our faith make us quick to forgive with a willingness to show mercy, if our faith make us humble and we realize we need God more than ever, if our faith gives us hope, then we are on the way to accepting the invitation of God's words in the Scriptures today.

Faith tells us that we should see ourselves as more than our work and troubles. It allows us to re-humanize ourselves and remember that we are more than the things that make us feel helpless and isolated. If you can truly believe that you are part of the Body of Christ and you belong to God, you have a share in salvation and redemption. Then we can embrace every new day with hope. Can we do this, embrace every day with hope?

Allow our readings to give you hope when Zechariah, the prophet, gives hope to the remnant of God's faithful. The remnant of God is given words of rejoicing, hope, restorations, and reassurance in the promise of God. We need to remember that they are coming out of one of the darkest times in Israel's history and now hear that God is going to rebuild the Temple. He is going to restore Jerusalem. He is going to send a new king, a new King David. With the reading from the prophet Zechariah, which we read on Palm Sunday, God will come as our king, just Savior, meek and riding on a colt, the foal of an ass. This is a direct reference to Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, days before he is crucified. Zechariah's prophecy came fulfilled some 500 years later.

Again, Israel has seen many leaders coming riding on horses, with swords and spears, but not many in power and authority and never one coming so humbly. The hope was given to them that this new King would banish their oppressors and oppression, and proclaim peace to the nations. His reign would cover the earth. I would think if I/you were a remnant of God in those days, you would find hope in Zechariah words.

I am doing my best to focus on God, and His words, listen to our Shepherds, read more about the life of the saints and people I know of deep faith and prayer. I only want to hear the truth.

So I turn to Jesus, and listen more attentively to the Gospel. Jesus gives us a glimpse into His heart. When He says in Matthew's gospel, "what you have hidden from the learned and clever you revealed to the little ones." The little ones are not only the children, but also the poor, those who are not important in society and in the community. Jesus asks that these "little ones" should always be the center of the concern of the communities because "The Father in Heaven does not will that one of these little ones should be lost" (Mt 18:14).

The disciples want to know who is greater in the Kingdom. The simple fact of this question reveals that they have not understood anything or very little of the message of Jesus. Jesus and his community of believers must follow Jesus into a life of service, of pardon, of reconciliation and of charity and love without seeking one's own interest. Paul gives reference to this by following the spirit and not the flesh; this is the guidance for all Christians. Spirit gives life, life give us hope.

So we have before us today the little one and the greater one. The disciples ask for criteria so as to be able to measure the importance of the people in the community: “Who is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus answers that it is the little ones! Again, the little ones are not socially important; they do not belong to the world of the powerful. The disciples have to become like little children. In this way we are filled with hope!

We know that St. Paul offers Abraham as a model of the virtue of hope. God had promised Abraham that he would have an heir through his wife Sarah and descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky. He had many human reasons for giving up waiting to have a child with Sarah. After all, Abraham and his wife were already advanced in age, he was 99 and Sarah was 90 years old and barren. Yet, Abraham continued to believe that God would be faithful to His promise. St. Paul states, “He believed, hoping against hope, that he would become ‘the father of many nations,’ according to what was said, ‘Thus shall your descendants be’”, check in Romans 4:18.

Abraham trusted in God’s word and had faith in His power to do what appeared to be absolutely impossible. His trust was not based on human assurances but on God’s word. Pope Francis commented on Abraham’s virtue of hope, stating, “[his] great hope is rooted in faith, and it is precisely for this reason that it is able to go beyond all hope. Yes, because it is based not on our word, but on the Word of God.”

Zechariah was a messenger of Hope. Abraham is our Father of Hope. Paul is a believer in Hope. Jesus is Hope Himself. And we are called to go out and be witnesses today of Hope to a Hopeless world.

