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Today, sisters and brothers, the Church invites us to reflect on two familiar passages of scripture. The first reading from the prophet Zechariah offers us royal imagery for the establishment of God's reign in Jerusalem and beyond. The context is the land of Judah where the people have lived under foreign domination for several centuries. In this oracle the prophet summons ancient Israel to remain firm in faith and to hope in future salvation. He urges them to look beyond the burden of their present circumstances to the day when their own king would arise in triumph to bring an end to turmoil and tears, and to restore the shalom throughout the land for which they had long yearned.

However, the imagery is also paradoxical. How can this be? How could Judah's king, as he was described here, possibly bring about the restoration promised to the people? Commentators tell us that unlike other royal figures of the Ancient Near East whose horse-drawn chariots made it clear that the purpose of their kingship was conquest, the traditional imagery employed by the people of Israel demonstrates their understanding that the purpose of Judah's king, and the nation itself, would not be imperialism, but rather "justice and fidelity to a higher king."

In my own reflection what struck me is that this image also calls to mind other instances which reveal that God's ways are not our ways; for God often works by reversing the status quo and accomplishing God's mission in ways that we least expect. Here, I am thinking of Abraham and Sarah; Joseph who was abandoned by his brothers; David, the youngest of Jesse's eight sons; Hannah, Ruth, Esther, Mary of Nazareth, Paul and so many others. Because God's ways are not our ways, we can only begin to perceive them if we are able to look beyond what meets the eye. In other words, to see with the eyes of faith.

But looking beyond what meets the eye is not easy in our day. It seems as if everything in our culture pushes back against it. Some theorists say that this is a "Post-Christian" age. We need look no further.



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However, scripture issues a different call. It is a call to deep faith in the presence and work of the Triune God who is at once mystery and revelation. I believe that in order to see with the eyes of faith we are required to continue to nurture a spirituality of the sons and daughters of this Triune God. A spirituality that:

- stirs our sense of wonder,
- awakens our delight in a God of surprises,
- rouses that precious gift of awe which we knew in our early years;
- sets us at ease with the knowledge that there will always be things beyond our control; and
- fosters the kind of loving trust born of confidence in our identity as daughters and sons of a gracious and merciful God.

Sisters and brothers, in our Gospel today, Jesus reveals a relationship with his Abba that is focused, intimate and real. What is astounding is the revelation that he chooses us to participate in this relationship too (Matthew 11:27). We have been invited to live a similar focused, intimate and real relationship with God. Now, what does this mean for us as we make our way through this thing called life?

I think that we find one answer in the final section of today's Gospel. It is one of the most consoling passages in the Bible. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28-30)" There are different kinds of burdens, to be sure: the burden of guilt, unresolved hurts and broken relationships; the burden of declining health and anxiety about care in the senior years of life; financial burdens and so on. Then, there are burdens associated with the legitimate discharge of responsibilities, which some parents might experience, for example, as they struggle to hold down their job as well as take care of their children at home. And then, here in North America and further afield, there is the necessary burden of reckoning with the nation's racist past both within the society and within the human heart.



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Sisters and brothers, these are difficult and oftentimes unavoidable situations and so the words of Jesus are very powerful. “Take up my yoke,” he says, “learn from me.” Lean into that that focused, intimate and real relationship with the Divine that I explained to you. Embrace the teachings of the Lord. Be not afraid. “I am gentle and humble in heart.” “Take up my yoke.” You will not be alone. “I am with you to the end of time” (Matthew 28:20). This is the promise of the Gospel - that God will always be with us. Indeed, it is the message of all of sacred scripture.

Jesus promises rest. What is this rest? It is the peace that enfolds our soul when we come to appreciate that by virtue of the Spirit of Christ that dwells in us, we have been invited into a communion with our loving Lord that endures for eternity.

This is the theme that runs through our readings today. On the one hand, the first reading from the prophet Zechariah spoke of the shalom that the king will bring not only to Jerusalem but to the ends of the earth. On the other hand, our Gospel brings God’s vision of shalom down to the very personal level of our relationship with the Lord.

These readings challenge us to believe in the vision of abiding peace that God has for each one of us, for our neighbour and for the wider world. However, we will only believe in the truth of this vision if we can look trustingly with eyes of faith at the often paradoxical ways in which God works in this world. We cultivate this vision through the spirituality of sons and daughters of the Triune God. It is a spirituality that brings us into communion with God and frees us to shoulder in faith the gentle yoke of Christ, for there we will find the grace that lightens our burdens and brings rest to our souls.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Sr. Carla M. Thomas, O.P.