

THE EMMAUS SERIES

14th Sunday, Year A

Zechariah 9: 9-10

Romans 8: 9, 11-13

Matthew 11: 25-30

Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest

Today's gospel reading from Matthew - filled with light and joy - is all the more remarkable, in that it follows passages that recall a lack of response to the ministry of Jesus in his own region of Galilee. The leaders of the nation have rejected him; in Judea, he is despised as a Galilean; and now his own people have turned against him. Perhaps this passage, that promises 'rest', recalls the times he took his disciples aside to encourage them. But his call is universal, it includes 'all' who are overwhelmed by discouragement to come to him. We will find our encouragement in the joy brought by faith in him.

The note of joy brought by faith already sounds in the words of the prophet, in the first reading. Jesus knew that, despite all these setbacks, his ministry and his words are the long awaited climax to the remarkable tradition of faith and hope that has sustained the common people who were the true believers of old Israel. 'Rejoice, daughter of Zion! Shout with gladness', the prophet cries out, rejoice because the messiah king is coming - doing away with the 'horses' and other things of war, he will ride on a donkey, but strong and triumphant, as he brings a peace that embraces the whole world.

Gathering his disciples around him, Jesus encouraged them by sharing with them, in prayer, the joy he found in the relationship with his Father that was his very life. The themes of the Scriptures heard in the synagogue, must often have found an echo in the prayer of Jesus. This passage brings out something we could easily overlook, as we ask ourselves how Jesus formed his disciples and prepared them to take up the great mission to which he was calling them. By sharing his prayer with them, he teaches them the great truths they must announce to the world - the mystery of his relationship with his Father; the strength he found in that relationship, how he made his whole life an expression of the ways of the Father. In the remarkable moment of prayer remembered in this gospel, Jesus is filled with joy and gratitude that the Father gives a privileged place to the 'little ones' who have been the first concern of his ministry. It is the simple people who have kept the faith of Israel alive, and who will carry on his mission down through the ages. As the disciples share in his prayer, he helps them to 'know' the Father. In the language of the Scriptures, let us recall, this word means far more than gathering information. It implies a sharing of life that brings the joys and security of true friendship. It was in his prayer that they came to know the intimacy with the Father that he expressed in the word, Abba, when addressing his Father. We know from St Paul, that the first Christians adopted this same form of address to the eternal Father (see Gal 4:6). As they recalled that he taught them to begin their prayer, 'Our Father', memories of the prayer he had shared with them must have given a greater depth to their personal prayer.

Both Paul and John tell us we should make the Saviour the model of our Christian life. He was himself the perfect embodiment of the life to which God's faithful people are called. In the time of Jesus, the rabbis spoke of the Law as God's 'yoke'. The Saviour assures that if we try to live as he would live, the 'yoke' of New Law he brings is 'easy and light'.

John Thornhill sm