

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

Homily for the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

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Reflections on Zech 9:9-10; Rom 8:9. 11-13; Mt. 11:25-30 – July 6, 2014

There are plenty of times when, during the reading of the Sunday scriptures, we hear messages that are less than comforting. Some might even call them distressing. You know—the “hard sayings” of Jesus . . . or the laments and woes of the prophets.

More than once, as a lector, I have been tempted to conclude a reading of one of these somber-toned scripture passage with a question rather than a concluding statement: “The word of God?”

Even without such a prompt, our congregation is still known for murmuring and chuckling at our more challenging readings as they reply, half-heartedly, “Thanks be to God.”

Well today’s readings are not like that. They are so beautiful, so consoling, so comforting, so visionary, and so true, that they deserve—like fine wine—to be savored and savored again.

Now that we have heard the *Inclusive Lectionary* take on them, I thought it would be helpful to review and perhaps elaborate on them using both the official *Catholic Lectionary* and – how to put this? – some paraphrases of my own. The aim is not just to amplify the good news of these readings through restatement, but also to offer a new slant on them here and there.

For Matthew’s Gospel, I could have invoked the Southern accent of “The Cotton Patch Gospel.” But I felt that a contemporary California version would be preferable to Clarence Jordan’s version of 1970. So Anne will read the *New American Bible* version of the text, and I will add comments after each verse.

Let’s start with Zechariah:

Zechariah 9:9-10

Thus says the LORD: Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you;

Look, sister! Do you see what I see? The One we can really trust to govern justly and make things right is on his way. But we had better not expect him to arrive in a Cadillac or anything fancy like that.

A just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.

He might just be driving an old Ford pickup—one with no air conditioning . . . and a stick-shift.

He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim,

Now comes the fun part, my friends: watch how he’ll make those stretch limos vanish from Vegas,

and the horse from Jerusalem;

With a wave of his finger, he’ll make all the armored vehicles—all the tanks in all the armies—grind to a halt in their tracks!

the warrior’s bow shall be banished,

We won’t see any more helicopter gunships or hellfire missiles; they’ll all be grounded for good—or maybe reconfigured to fight wildfires in California.

and he shall proclaim peace to the nations.

When Yahweh’s voice is heard, it will be the voice of peace. And finally, on that day, the nations will learn to get along.

His dominion shall be from sea to sea,

The *kindom* of God won’t be stopped by any borders; every fence between here and Tierra del Fuego is going to be flattened. God’s peace shall embrace the whole globe!

And reach from the river to the ends of the earth.

It will flow like a mighty river, from the snow-capped mountains to the seven seas.

Or to quote from the prophet Amos, as Martin Luther King famously did: “Justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

What a great vision of the peaceable *kindom* we have in Zechariah! I can't wait for it to happen!

Romans 8:9, 11-13

In the second reading, Paul asks us to look inwards: he actually wants us to share his joy at the realization that we have a priceless treasure in our bodies—deep within—the indwelling Holy Spirit. Let's look anew at the reading we heard from Paul's letter to the Romans:

Brothers and sisters:

Brothers and sisters, Paul says, "I have some good news for you."

You are not in the flesh;

Just imagine! There's more to you and me than meets the eye; there's much more to us than what anyone can feel or touch or see.

on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you.

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in you, you're like a new creation. It's a whole new ball game.

...

If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also.

"If you are hosting within your heart the Spirit, the one who raised Jesus from the dead, then smile! You've got a VIP inside you! This amazing guest, who brought Christ back from death to life, will do the same for you, even if you die!" says Paul.

Consequently, brothers and sisters, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

And so, dear ones, let us breathe a sigh of relief, since we owe nothing to the materialistic, self-seeking values of the world.

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die,

If you love your "stuff" too much, and cling too much to worldly values, they're going to let you down in the end.

but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

So if, with the Spirit's help, you overcome your grasping, materialistic tendencies, all will be well. You'll be cool! You will live!

Paul puts this teaching in terms of Spirit and flesh, and he knows which is the stronger. He assures us that the Spirit is a formidable guest of our souls—an advocate who will never let us down.

Mt. 11:25-30

Turning to Matthew, we have a Gospel that is full of the topsy-turvy wisdom of the Beatitudes. What's not to love about this insider's guide to the Creator? Jesus doesn't just let us in on a secret – he seems to delight in how the experts and the authorities *don't* get it, and *can't* get it; but the truth is as plain as day to the little ones—to the simple folk. (That's why I requested that we sing "'Tis a gift to be simple" as our gathering song.)

At that time Jesus exclaimed: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to little ones.

"Thank you, Abba God — creator of all that is, visible and invisible; thank you for your *subtlety*; thank you for making your ways unfathomable to the "experts"—those who think they are wise and learned. And yet . . . obvious to ordinary, simple folk!

Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will, that all things have been handed over to me by yourself.

Yes, Abba God, you have been pleased to give me the *real* stewardship—*genuine dominion* over all things—all things bright and beautiful.

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him."

Jesus describes the special intimacy between himself and Abba God. It's something like the bond between a parent and a child: an intimacy which only Jesus can claim to possess; yet he promises to share it—at least with some of us.

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.

But to *all* of us—especially all who work hard and get bone-tired, Jesus gives this blanket invitation: "Come to me; rest in me."

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart;

Incredibly, Jesus invites us to *share his work*, shoulder to shoulder! He adds, in so many words, “Let me show you how to live as gently as I: simply, and in all humility!”

and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Those who collaborate (yoke themselves together in the work of Jesus) will indeed find rest, because Jesus’ burden is easy to carry. In compari-

son to many other burdens, his hardly weighs a thing.

To conclude: rarely do all three of our scripture readings contain good news which is *this* good. The messages for this week almost take our breath away.

This may be a good time to sit quietly and bask in their afterglow.

Be at peace! Amen!