

Homily: 14th Sunday in OT 2020

Bishop Mark reflected on the readings we've just heard today in his statement which you may have seen and heard on YouTube, which followed the announcement of the resumption of public Masses. The opening words from Zechariah "*Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Jerusalem, shout with gladness, daughter of Sion.*"

It is a great joy to be back here and at Mass, and see each other, but also very conscious of how many are still remaining in isolation, protecting themselves and their families. Zechariah is writing after the many years spent in exile in Babylon, and the return to Jerusalem.

The strange thing about our exile is it feels long and short. Most of us say how the time has sped by, and yet in another way seems a long time since we all saw each other. Zechariah's people came back after years away, and had to rebuild; We: not years or rebuild, but it is different and will go on being so, for it is not over. We can't just do as we please either here or elsewhere; can't even sit where we want. We must respect and have a great regard for each other.

Zechariah gives us the familiar image that we know fulfils itself on Palm Sunday, the king, coming glorious, triumphant, humble, riding a donkey, not a war horse, bringing peace. Every Mass we remember 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.' The king who brings us peace. Much to rejoice as we return; and I pay tribute to the few parishioners across the parish we have enabled it to happen.

The Psalm is praise of God's mighty works, and tells us about God too. Kind, full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love, compassionate to all. A beautiful psalm to have on our lips and in our hearts, as life resumes a little more normality.

What we have been missing is the Spiritual, as the doors of 'the house of the Lord were necessarily locked. Yes of course we can and have prayed at home and elsewhere; joined livestreaming Masses and acts of worship in our own country and indeed across the world. But as Catholics we know we need that King who comes to us, the Word made flesh who dwelt

among us, to feed and nourish us sacramentally with his own body and blood in Holy Communion.

Bishop Mark went on to reflect on the gospel, which he had chosen for his ordination to the Priesthood 30 years ago. The gospel opens with Jesus speaking of his Father revealing his mysteries to “mere children.” The emphasis on littleness and humility, is so important for all of us, as disciples of Jesus. It is still so relevant today. Bishop Mark spoke of our humble diocese, great in generosity and loving service, yet relatively small in numbers. He says: “it has always amazed me how much is done, how much influence and impact there is by a parish community, when there is a relatively small proportion of local people going to the church.”

The gospel then situates Jesus’ life in His loving relationship with his Father. We hear him say “Everything *has been entrusted to me by my Father.*”

Bishop Mark then went on, “If the last few months have taught us anything, it is the reality that as human beings we are not masters of our world. Nor should we see ourselves as merely victims of blind fate. That is potentially one of the most damaging aspects of these past months. Because this virus seems to be able to hit any of us, at any time, anywhere, we may be tempted to believe that our life, and a possible immanent death, does not matter. Am I just another statistic? In the face of these troubling realities, it is important to be reminded that God is *our* Father. He looks at each of us with the self–same love with which He looks eternally at His Son.

Cardinal Hume often reminded us ‘God doesn’t take his eyes off us: not to catch us out, but because he loves us.’ This is the consolation and immense power of our faith. In our closeness to Jesus, we are brought into the very life of God Himself: Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

And if this is true for us, then it is also an offer – a truth –available to every human being. Each one is infinitely loved by God, desired by him, and looked upon by him with a continuous loving gaze. I hope in these months that we can consciously live beneath that loving gaze. To do so enables us to live more generously in service and love of others, especially the poor and vulnerable.”

We then hear those very familiar words of Jesus, and in the on-going situation do we not indeed need to hear them “*Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.*”

The invitation of Jesus is extended in the imperative form, and it is extended to all people: ***Come: Take: Learn.***

The joy today we can come: come back to him sacramentally. The Lord knows how arduous life can be. He knows many things weary the heart; disappointment and wounds of the past, burdens to carry and wrongs to bear in the present, uncertainties and worries about the future.

In the face of all this Jesus first word is an invitation, a call to move and respond “Come”. The mistake, when things go wrong, is to stay where we are, lying there. Obviously it is different if we are isolating. Otherwise Come:

Take: We take his yoke. Remember a yoke is not itself a burden. It is a piece of equipment – a double collar – by which two beasts of burden were linked together. Being linked physically together meant neither beast carried a burden on their own. Through sharing the same burden, they experienced relief and rest. At the heart of divine mercy is the reality that Jesus has come to join himself to us and to lift our burden upon himself, which he makes light by empowering us with his strength and his Spirit.

And thus we learn, as daily he teaches us, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We take up daily our cross and follow him. Jesus awaits us: not to magically solve our problems, but to strengthen us amid our problems. Hence we can rejoice in heart and soul, for the Lord is with us.