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14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, July 9, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A
First Reading: Zechariah 9:9–10
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:1–2, 8–11, 13–14 | **Response:** Psalm 145:1
Second Reading: Romans 8:9, 11–13
Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 11:25
Gospel Reading: Matthew 11:25–30
Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa**.**

We just heard that God has hidden things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants. When I hear that line I think of a story when a young dad who had a young son were walking back from Church one day after Mass and the father said to his son, "who do you think Father was speaking to today during his homily? The children in the church, or the adults?" And his son thinks for awhile, his brow burrowed in thought, and then he gets this big smile on his face and he says: "I think he was talking to himself."

I hope I'm not speaking to myself today. But we must ask ourselves what is going on here because Jesus is not talking to himself. In today's Gospel we hear Jesus explaining his image of God. We hear how he relates to God as Father, and how God is revealed more to infants, or children or those poor little ones than to the so-called wise and learned. Jesus has been explaining to his disciples about the Kingdom of God. He has been healing, forgiving and teaching his disciples the Good News. But he has also realized that his relationship with God is different to that of the Pharisees and the Scribes and the Jewish rabbis.

You see, the Pharisees, Scribes and the Jewish rabbis were resistant to Jesus' Good News. They viewed Jesus's Good News as a threat or a destabilizing force, because it challenged the very structure of their lives which had been given over to the study of God as they understood God in Judaism. There was a tradition in Judaism that privileged Wisdom. But this wisdom was given to those who feared God. This involved studying the Torah for many years, and learning the law, the languages the law was written in, and the literature it was expressed in. It also

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meant you had to have enough time to reflect on all of this. So ultimately, it meant that only a very small minority were considered wise. In Jesus' time, it was the Pharisees, Scribes and Rabbis who were considered wise.

But if being wise is being familiar with God and understanding God's laws and his desires for us, in today's Gospel Jesus turns this on its head when He says you just need to be a little child in order to know the Father because the Son reveals the Father to infants. Jesus could do this because He had come to know his father the way a son does: not by studying books about him, but by living in his presence, listening for his voice, and learning from him as an apprentice does from a master, by watching and imitating. He discovered that the wise and learned were getting nowhere in their relationship to God, and that the children and the other 'little people'—the poor, the sinners, the tax-collectors, ordinary people —were discovering more of God, simply by following him.

But Jesus doesn't just stop there. He invites those who are tired and worn out by the challenges and burdens of life to come to Him; with him, he says, they will find rest for their souls.

This is a very comforting command. We all carry different burdens. Our burden might be that of sickness or old age, family difficulties or financial problems. It might be the weight of years of responsibility in some profession or job. It might simply be the ongoing effort involved in trying to live a good and decent life.

Jesus invites us then to be like little children, to come to him, and to take on his yoke. Not many of us know what a yoke is nowadays. It was the instrument that bound animals as they were ploughing or pulling something. In taking on the yoke, one is obedient. In throwing it off, we become disobedient. But there is another symbolic meaning of the yoke, and that is that there were always two animals yoked. The two oxen bear the yoke together. Jesus is saying not only to take up the yoke, but to learn from him in doing so. So we do not carry our burdens alone. Jesus is standing with us, and shares our burden.

Jesus is gentle and humble, welcoming and forgiving, ready to help those who come to him, and who can recognize Jesus and God in the world, through the actions of his saving Spirit.

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Our reading from Paul has themes that are similar to those in the gospel. He contrasts what he calls life in the flesh and life in the spirit. The flesh here is not the body in opposition to the soul but rather human life as cut off from God and turned in on itself. The spirit, on the other hand, points to human life as open to God and receptive to God's gifts.

We can only live spiritually if the Spirit of God dwells in us. That is to say, if we allow God's Spirit to dwell in us.

As much as we naturally focus in today's reading on the gift that Jesus offers, it would be a distortion not to take seriously the demands that are expected from our discipleship. Although Jesus describes his yoke as easy and his burden as light, this part of His Sermon on the mount makes clear that turning to him demands a way of life that mirrors his own, it requires a definite turn – a conversion in the proper sense. The same teaching is to be found in Paul. Those who receive the gift of the Spirit are to live in ways that correspond to and reflect it. Whether we think of the Christian life in terms of imitating Jesus or of living according to his Spirit, our response to God's gift is an essential part of it. We must imitate Jesus in the way he related to His Father. He gave us a simple way of praying, he was a simple humble person. If we can manage that, then the rejoicing we hear in the first reading, where the Prophet Zechariah foretells the events of Palm Sunday will ring true for us today. We will behold our king, and we can rejoice and shout aloud, because our messiah is triumphant and victorious, but he is the one who is humble and riding a donkey.

Let us pray today that we might listen to Jesus in our lives.

Let us pray that we might take all our burdens to him.

Let us pray that we might be the disciples he calls us to be.

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