

ORDINARY SUNDAY XIV “A”    JULY 2/3, 2011

We have just heard some of the most consoling words of Jesus in the gospels: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Mt. 11:28-30). As we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of our country again this weekend, I am reminded of similar words with a similar message of consolation.

Standing in New York Harbor is one of the quintessential symbols of our nation—the Statue of Liberty. On its base is a bronze plaque engraved with a sonnet composed by Emma Lazarus in 1883. Its last few verses read: “Give me our tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

This Fourth of July Weekend will be full of patriotic speeches, displays of military hardware, and “bombs bursting in air and the rocket’s red glare” proclaiming our place on the stage of the world’s kingdoms. But for all of that, today’s scriptures and Emma Lazarus’ sonnet, challenge us to an alternate view of power might and greatness as Church, as nation, as individuals.

The past few months have brought searing images of people overwhelmingly burdened—earthquake victims in Japan; people in the Mideast striving to free themselves from the shackles dictatorships; tornado and flood victims in our country and state; families and individuals struggling to make ends meet in the midst of a world-wide economic downturn. In addition, I know that some here at Mass today are carrying some very heavy, of illness, (your own or a loved one’s), grief, broken family relationships, anxiety regarding employment. And then there are all those that remain unspoken in the depths of the heart.

Into the midst of these burdens, our readings proclaim a God who is not distant from us or inattentive to our situation. Zechariah prophesies the arrival of the coming

Messiah in imagery borrowed from triumphal parades after military conquests but drastically changes it. There is no army. Just the Prince of Peace entering in triumph but not on a warhorse, or today standing astride an armored tank. Rather he comes astride a donkey, the humble means of transportation shared by the common people of his day, if today a well-worn used car. Here is a different kind of king, a different kind of kingdom, a different world order.

What Zechariah foretold we proclaim fulfilled in Jesus. Throughout the gospels while Jesus' love extends to all people, special attention is given to the poor, the marginalized, the burdened, the victims of the winds of fate or the deliberate machinations of the powerful. Jesus reveals not a God of power and might, (as were the gods of pagan lands or the God and Jesus some Christians today like to imagine or create) and elevate for emulation. In Jesus we meet, and are met, by a God who comes to us in the midst of our human burdens and brokenness; a suffering God; broken and poured out and given over to death on a cross; a God still with us in broken bread and a poured out cup of wine in the reality of his sacramental presence; the Savior, the Messiah, the King who bids us, to emulate him in reaching out to the overwhelmed, the burdened, the stressed, in our daily lives in ourselves risking being broken and poured out in hospitality, compassion, forgiveness, and justice. In God's Kingdom, as Jesus proclaims and lives it, power and greatness are measured in how the least, the powerless, and the little ones are treated and raised up. This is the gentle "yoke" of Jesus with which he binds us and with which we are called to bind others. Seen in this light, the lyrics of Emma Lazarus about Lady Liberty also describe Jesus who holds the lamp of divine compassion in earth's dark night and bids us, now, to do the same.

**Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame/ With conquering limbs astride from  
land to land;/ Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand/ A mighty woman with  
a torch, whose flame/ Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name/ Mother of Exiles.  
From her beacon-hand/ Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command/ The  
air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame,/ "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!"  
cries she/ With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,/ Your huddled masses  
yearning to breathe free,/ The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the  
homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"**