

OPENING COLLECT

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that with you as our ruler and guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not our hold on things eternal; grant this, heavenly Father, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING: Zechariah 9.9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle-bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

There are many passages in the Scriptures/Old Testament, which look forward to the moment when God will send his Messiah or 'Anointed One', and so bring new hope/salvation to his people. Most of the writers look for a conquering king. At least, that is what the people wanted, another king, like David, the successful leader, who was blessed by God. Zechariah, however, speaks of a different sort of king, of a king riding not on a warhorse but on a donkey; a king who will bring peace and not war, freedom and not imprisonment. All this, of course, raises the question as to whether the action of God in the world will be recognised, the question raised by today's Gospel and still relevant today.

SECOND READING: Romans 7.15-25a

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

It is quite difficult to tie this passage from Romans into the two other set passages. Paul is remarkably honest, here. He recognises that walking the way of the cross, the way of love, is not easy. "The evil that I do not want, he says, is what I do" (v.19). The only way out of this common human failing, the only source of rescue, is God. God knows our weakness, and can set our hearts to following the way of Christ, and our minds to believing in the power of the Spirit at work in our lives. However you understand the death of Christ to be effective, the truth is that the more you look to God and the more you trust him, the more likely you are to overcome the human failing! There is a way to be free 'from the law of sin', or as we might say, 'the tendency to selfishness'.

Epistle continued:

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

We need to recognise where rescue comes from: live the new life 'in Christ' and constantly seek to share this life with others for God wants to save the world. Perhaps it does link to the Gospel!

Gospel: Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30

At that time Jesus said,

16 'To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, 17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!"

Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. 25 I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent

and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

More from Matthew! Following his description of the 'pilot mission', in chapter 10, which ends with the challenge (last week's Gospel) to do all in the name of Christ and to the glory of God, Matthew recalls how John the Baptist sent his disciples to question Jesus. Now Jesus puts the ministry of John the Baptist into context. He sees him, clearly, as the forerunner, the Elijah of Malachi 3, who will come before the 'day of the Lord'. This day has now dawned, but Jesus records, in today's Gospel, the failure of the people to recognise God at work in John or himself, as we anticipated in our scriptural passage. People did not understand the real significance of the ministry of John, any more than they were ready to receive Jesus. So, Matthew makes it very clear that the people simply failed to see who Jesus was, to see God at work, and to recognise what he stood for.

However, even if the authorities do not recognise what is going on, the 'infants' (v.25) do., and when they respond, they discover the power of the new life. The invitation is there, but we have to admit to being inadequate to carry our burden and in need of help. There will still be much to do, but we will be empowered.

Post-Communion Collect:

Eternal God, comfort of the afflicted and healer of the broken, you have fed us at the table of life and hope: teach us the ways of gentleness and peace, that all the world may acknowledge the kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord..
Amen.