LIFTING OFF OUR YOKE AND BURDEN

Today many people are living in pains.   Whether we know it or not, all of us are weary, weighed down and heavy laden.  The outcome is restlessness, nervous breakdown, stroke, neurosis, death, cardiac attack, burn-outs, bickering, fighting, diseases, insecurity and living in fears.  The first reading tells us that one of the causes of these situations is war.  In the days of Zechariah, chariots and horses were highly priced items used only for war making.  They were the aircraft carriers and nuclear missiles of his day.  As a result the people did not enjoy peace and rest as wars characterized the government of the king who was chosen first and foremost to defend the people from their enemies.  In this passage God promises to send a king who in his humility will ride on a lowly beast of burden and banish chariots, horses and bows that are instruments of insecurity, fear and restlessness.

In the second reading, Paul sees lack of rest not in wars – physical combat involving humans against fellows but in the human flesh.  Here he uses the word flesh to speak of human frailty, a concept that goes far beyond that which is merely sensual.  He is pointing to general human weaknesses; particularly sins of sensuality that bring us disease and addictions.  Hatred, envy, arrogance, and elitism tear nations apart in wars.  Prejudice and racism tear nations asunder internally and bring exhausting tensions between us as we attempt to live together as one nation.  Competitiveness, envy and self-centeredness cause us to be held captive in our business and professional careers at the cost of taking us away from our spouses, children, and families.  We are heavily burdened by our misdeeds.  The weight of their consequences is a heavy load indeed.  The world of the flesh, the world that is separated from God, wears us down and exhausts us with its heavy burdens.

In the gospel Jesus, the meek king who is to come, sets out to invite the people already yoked and burdened to come and be given rest.  A yoke is a heavy plank, very heavy to be lifted.  But when affixed to two oxen, makes it easy for them to carry out a task.  The yoke is placed upon the oxen to aid them in drawing the load.   Using this familiar concept, Jesus explains how, if yoked to him, their burden of life can be made light.  That is to say, when we lose our grip of God through attachment to personal needs and or indulgence into sin, the consequence makes life very burdensome.  Though life’s challenges may likely lead to pains but if we are living for God, the burden will be minimal, and with Jesus leading the way, he carries our burden for us.  Though we may feel the outcome of bad administration in the world, yet the freedom of not being responsible to it, or the joy of fellowship with Jesus or faithfulness to the commandments of God that exonerates believers from the burden of sin or intimacy with Jesus aids us in carrying the problems of life light.

Being yoked to Christ is surrendering our will to him.  Jeremiah tells God’s children that the only way to find rest for their souls is to walk in the way of the Lord (Jeremiah 6:16).  Through Moses, God tells the Israelites that if they walk in his ways, his presence shall go with them, and he will give them rest (Ex 33:13-14).  When our will is swallowed up in the will of God, and we begin to live according to the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5), we become humble and then able to experience the peace of mind which passes all understanding. Walking in the ways of God’s commandments is walking in company with Christ whose bread is to do the will of God (Jon 4:34).  This is the way out to rest.

But unfortunately, some people think they can achieve rest and relaxation through partying, eating, drinking, picnic, vacation, etc.  While these can help, what they offer do not last, and at times they constitute a great burden themselves.  But today Jesus is telling us that lack of rest is a problem that he can best handle.  Taking them away is something we cannot do by ourselves.   As a matter of fact it is impossible for us to do it by ourselves.  We must, in the simplicity of children, trust and hope in what Christ can do for us.  We must take his yoke upon us and let Him join us in pulling our loads through life.  “For cut off from me”, he said, “you can do nothing” (Jon 15:5). So, yoked together, like oxen are yoked, we can with Christ pull any load (vicissitudes of life) along with cheerfulness. That is to say that no load that life imposes on us can possibly be too heavy if we are joined with Christ.  This involves surrender enough to allow Jesus do his part.  For it is one thing to come to him, and another thing to surrender to him and allow him lift off our loads.