

The Fourteenth Sunday of the Year.

Exactly a week ago I was in Jericho. It is the oldest continually inhabited city in the world and is in the Jordan Valley and the Judean Desert. It was near Jericho that Jesus experienced the temptation in the Wilderness. It is an oasis city and an island of green and fertile land in the hot harsh desert. For 12,000 years, and including the present day, the hot, thirsty traveller has found rest and refreshment in this oasis town.

It is precisely that kind of rest that Jesus' is describing in today's Gospel. "Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest", says Jesus. For most of us rest might well be relaxing in front of the television after a day's work or some other kind of relaxation. All this is included in what Jesus is offering and there is far more. The word used in the original language of the Gospel actually means the kind of experience of the exhausted traveller coming into an oasis full of beautiful food and fresh cool water and refreshment after the hot desert day. He is expressing the nature of his gift to us which is of life full and flourishing. Human life in its fullness; humanity fully alive and not just dozing in front of the television!

This is the invitation and it is made to those who "labour and are overburdened". Jesus is referring to all of us in that the burdens and the ache of exhaustion and weariness will come to us all at different times in our lives. Distress will be different for each of us but it will surely come at different times and take different forms. It could be related to health, increasing age, unemployment, the uncertainty and passion of youth, the list is endless. It does not matter what it is. The message is that whenever we experience the wilderness and desert of life, Jesus is waiting to offer refreshment and life both in this world and, of course, in the next.

The best of human communication cannot fully express the magnificence and beauty of the gift which is offered to us in Jesus Christ. Notice how Jesus' offer of rest and refreshment and life to the full, grows out of his prayer to his Father. This is why the gift can be so challenging to accept and to trust because it is nothing less than a share in his life as God. Jesus speaks of his desire and task of revealing the goodness and truth of his Father; of somehow introducing us and drawing us into his relationship of love in the life of God. It is a share in that life that brings the fullness and wholeness of humanity, which is the exhilarating refreshment for which we all long and which is the presence and action of the Spirit of God within us. Something real and energising is the gift offered us in the Spirit.

The gift of wholeness then is a gift from God and is the life of God himself. How many times do we need to be reminded that we are created to become divine? Today's Gospel will teach us not to forget it.

If there is a problem it is with us and not with God. So often we are closed to the gift that God is offering. A strange thread in human nature urges us to find wholeness and deep satisfaction on our own through the use of our own energies and talents. When I was in Jerusalem an American priest was a member of our course. At one of the Masses when he was preaching he said that one of the fastest growing industries in the United States was the development of storage facilities where people could store all the possessions they were accumulating. That is an extreme illustration of the fact that we are too often fooled into thinking that we can come to the fullness of life through possessions or some other way in which we try and control wealth, power, other people or even God.

That is why Jesus blesses his Father for hiding “these things”, by which he means the “message of life”, from the learned and the clever revealing them instead to mere children. By children he means mere infants and those in Jesus’ time and culture who had no rights, power or status. See the Gospels and discover how it was those whose life experience had stripped them of power and status who were most open and receptive to what Jesus is always offering.

The challenge for us then is to answer a question. Are we tempted to think that life and peace can be won through the exercise of our own skills and powers or through the accumulation of wealth and possessions? If the answer is in anyway approaching yes, then we must, encouraged by this Gospel, think again.

All of us are invited to change our ways of looking at life. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, exhorts us to strike a balance between the unspiritual and the spiritual. In fact to set the balance in favour of the spiritual which is our relationship with God and our openness in trust to receive the life that he is offering. “Shoulder my yoke (by which he means his teaching) and learn from me, for I am humble and gentle in heart and you will find rest for my souls.”