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Today' s Word  
The Eleventh Sunday, Year A (5 July)

Parish Priest: Father Hiroshi Konishi

First Reading: Zechariah 9:9 - 10

Second Reading: Letter to the Romans 8:9, 11 - 13

Gospel Reading: Gospel of Matthew 11:25 - 30

## From Three Readings

The Old Testament prepares the way for the coming of Christ, the Savior. The Old Testament is filled with the conviction that God will surely send a Savior. And as history unfolded, the figure of the Savior gradually became clear.

The First Reading hints at the figure of the Savior who was to come: “King,” “one who obeys God,” “one to whom victory has been granted,” “one who comes riding on a donkey,” and “one who proclaims peace.” This is a unique image of the Savior, somewhat different from what people had imagined.

In the Second Reading, Paul asserts that Jesus Christ, the Savior, is filled with the Spirit. Since Christians have received the same Spirit as Christ, he urges them to live apart from the worldly values of the “flesh.”

In the Gospel reading, Jesus’ own words of praise reveal that he lives in a special relationship with God the Father. That is why we are called to live according to the yoke(yoke) that Jesus imposes, rather than the Law imposed by the Pharisees.

Look at the Gospel reading: “For I am gentle and humble in heart” (v. 29). “Gentle” is “praus” in Greek. It appears three times in the Gospel of Matthew (5:5, 11:29, 21:5). The third passage reads, “Behold, your King comes to you, meek and riding on a donkey.” This is a quotation from today’ s First Reading: “He comes riding on a donkey, without pride” (Zechariah 9:9). If we look at the Book of Zechariah, “pride” is the Hebrew word “ani,” which derives from the word “anau.” When translating the Hebrew “anaw” into Greek, the word “praeus” was used. Originally, “anaw” described the posture of a person who bends over and makes themselves small. From there, it came to be translated as “the poor,” referring to those suffering from economic hardship or oppression (Psalm 37:11: “The poor shall inherit the earth”). Furthermore, because it refers to someone who humbles themselves, the understanding of “the meek, the humble” emerged.

“Humility” is “tapeinois” in Greek, which means “one of low status.” Therefore, a literal translation of this passage would be “one who is low in status in their heart.”

The phrase “meek and humble” likely carried the nuance of “poor and of low social standing” inherent in the words themselves. In fact, Jesus was poor and, compared to the teachers of the Law, of low social standing. That is precisely why the poor and those of low social standing were able to approach Jesus with genuine peace of mind. But that is not all. Considering the context of today’s Gospel, Jesus Himself was indeed a “poor” person who could not live without relying on God the Father. And even as He preached the Kingdom of God, He was a “lowly” person who had been rejected by the people and was utterly exhausted. It is this Jesus who calls out, “Learn from me.” This phrase can also be translated as “Become my disciple.”

Next, in verse 30: “Take my yoke upon you,.....for my yoke is easy......” A yoke is a tool used to harness two oxen together. It is said that the size of the oxen was measured, a wooden yoke was crafted, and it was carefully adjusted so as not to injure the oxen’s necks. In the Bible, the Lord God’s rule over Israel was referred to as a “yoke” (see Jeremiah 2:20, 5:5; Lamentations 3:27; Hosea 10:11). Furthermore, the Law was also called a “yoke” as a manifestation of God’s rule (see Sirach 6:24 - 31; 51:26 - 27). The “yoke” that the scribes imposed on the people was a heavy one (see Matthew 23:4). Moreover, they merely laid the burden of the Law upon them without lifting a finger to help (see Luke 11:46).

However, Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,” and further, “My yoke is easy.” What is Jesus’ yoke? Since Jesus has already set forth the challenge, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Chapter 5, verse 20), we are likely being invited to live a “righteousness” that is different from the “righteousness” of keeping the Law. It seems that the “righteousness” of living in obedience to God the Father is found in the way of life of Jesus, who walked “in poverty and humility,” bearing the cross. Moreover, Jesus Himself shares that burden with us. “He bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows” (verse 8:17; cf. Isaiah 53:4).