

HOMILY SUNDAY 14 – A (Homily 02)

“Revealing God”

(Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 145; Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30)

No one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

This is a radical statement from the Gospel on the lips of Jesus. Is this statement really true? If so, what are the implications of that statement, especially for followers of other world religions? Where does that leave such age-old religions as Hinduism and Buddhism?

Without getting into a discussion on world religions, that statement does highlight how privileged we are to have faith in Jesus, and to worship God in spirit and truth, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We can say with certainty that Jesus does reveal a hidden nature of God that is unique, and missed completely by all other religions, and for that matter, most of the world.

Both the first reading and the Gospel describe one such feature of the nature of God, and that is humility. A natural reaction when we think of God is to think of power, might, glory, majesty, transcendence, and even things like wrath and vengeance.

In Jesus, we see just the opposite – a quiet humility. That is what the prophet Zechariah prophesied in the first reading: The king of Zion would someday come to Zion, “humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

We know that that prophecy, written centuries before Jesus, was fulfilled by Jesus by his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem the week before his passion. To those who had the eyes of faith, Jesus was revealing a side of God that no other religion could imagine – a humble messiah.

The religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, knew the Law, they knew the prophets such as Zechariah, yet they did not get it, they did not believe. The Jerome Biblical Commentary helps us understand why this was so, with these words:

“Jesus has not reached the wise and prudent, for his message has been grasped only by a few disciples drawn from the peasant and working class, but such is the work of the Father. The message of Jesus is not grasped by knowledge and understanding, but by revelation. Only the simple have accepted the insight the Father grants to those who wish it. There is a sense that Jewish wisdom and learning (knowledge of the Law) was a genuine obstacle to the understanding of the message of Jesus. The more one knew about the Law, the more difficult it was to see that the messianic revelation would supersede the Law. *All has been given to Jesus by the Father...*this is a direct contradiction of the Jewish claim to have the complete revelation of God in the Law and the Prophets. Jesus has a unique relation with the Father that others do not.

How fortunate we are to be given a share in that unique relationship that Jesus has with the Father, a relationship of humble, simple love.

There is another aspect of God that was hidden from the religious leaders with all their knowledge and learning, and it is the reality of a suffering messiah. That too, should have been picked up by them from the prophet Isaiah, who spoke of a suffering servant of God.

Dr. Hannah Kassis is a scholar on Islam who spoke at the Assembly of Western Bishops in 2007. He speaks Arabic, knows the Koran through and through, has a deep love for Muslims, and goes around the world helping Muslims be better Muslims. In his presentations he underlines the similarities between Islam and Christianity, such as a deep reverence for Mary, and the view of Abraham as our common ancestor in faith.

When asked by Muslims why he did not become a Muslim, he gives two reasons. The first is that they seem to lack a sense of symbolism and layered meaning. Their art is always plain and geometric. They see things literally, black and white, and seem to be incapable of grasping the subtleties of satire and certain kinds of humour such as good natured, poking fun at someone or some topic. That is why they were so upset when the Western media published cartoons of Mohammed. For them, that was neither satire nor humour – it was blasphemy, taken to such an extreme that people were killed in their righteous anger.

A second reason Dr. Kassis gave for not becoming Muslim was that the faith of Islam has no room whatsoever for a God who can suffer. That is totally beyond any realm of possibility for a Muslim. Allah is Great, Almighty, Absolute Other,

and cannot, to their minds, suffer in anyway. That too is blasphemy to them, so certainly Jesus on a cross has no meaning for them. They will say that Allah is compassionate, but to see that compassion lived out as Jesus lived it out, stretches them beyond their capability. Jesus revealed to us a side of God's nature that is beyond the world of Islam, and that is a second reason why Dr. Kassis never became a Muslim.

Given this reality, those words of Jesus ring even more deeply – no one knows the Father, except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. How fortunate we are to have the true nature of God revealed to us.

The readings go on to deepen our knowledge of the humble, compassionate God and how God works in the lives of those who believe in Jesus. First of all, Jesus, while humble, does have the power to overcome the chariots of Ephraim and the war horses of the nations, but he does so in a humble way, through unconditional, sacrificial love that aims to bring peace to the world. The power that God prefers to use is the power of *exousia*, the power of a baby, the power of powerlessness. Step One of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous understands this kind of power, when it invites members to profess that they are powerless over alcohol, that their lives are unmanageable.

That kind of power, however, is so hard for the rest of our world to understand, yet it is the power that will prevail, after all other forms of power will pass away. It is the power that God showed in the Incarnation, the birth of God into this world as a small child. It is that power that Jesus lived and demonstrated during his time on earth. He was so ordinary that there is nothing written about him in the Scriptures from the age of thirteen to the age of thirty.

During his public ministry, people did not accept him nor believe in his miracles because he was too ordinary, the son of Joseph and Mary. And on the cross, the silence of God and the forgiveness of Jesus again demonstrate that power of powerlessness, a power that could even accept death so that resurrection and the redemption of the world could follow.

So when Jesus speaks words of comfort and invitation to come to him and he will give us rest, we can believe him, though that rest may include suffering and facing some challenge. Like a parent or grandparent letting a child carry a pail of water with them, bearing only the weight that they can bear, Jesus extends to us the Father's compassionate love in the form of a yoke that he carries with us.

We also know that, as St Paul reminds us in the second reading, Jesus has given us his Spirit, and in that Spirit, we can live as he lived, lives of humble faith and patient, compassionate, forgiving love.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is precisely Jesus nourishing us with his Word, and with his Body and Blood, in a humble, gentle yet powerful way. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, humble gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus.

We who receive communion with faith, are in turn strengthened and transformed into the Body of Christ, sent out to a doubting, wounded and often unbelieving world, to share them how Jesus has revealed to us the true nature of God who is humble, compassionate love.