

14th Sunday A – Independence Day

Zechariah 9:9-10; Romans 8:9, 11-13; Mt 11:25-30

Today we celebrate the birth of the America.

As of this Fourth of July weekend, the United States is 244 years old. And, as we observe our nation's independence, perhaps we can appreciate more the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty: **“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free. Send these homeless tempest-tossed to me.”** These words sound pertinent for all of us, don't they?

In this age of COVID-19, we feel "tired" - loaded down, worried, burdened, “yearning to be free”. There are so many things today that greatly concern our family and overcast a future.

For the vast majority of us, making our way in the world in these long months, “locked down” and still restricted in many ways, have been overwhelming. Health concerns, virus concerns, family concerns, employment concerns, school concerns, future concerns, relationship concerns, (you name it) – they all keep coming at us - challenging us, exhausting us, burdening us, and sometimes even crushing us, depending on their frequency and their severity.

Life is no longer “normal”, is it? We've lost so much of life and may never be able to return to it as it was, never will be. Last Friday, as I was on the road to pick up bread for our Kupuna Ministries at the Love's Bakery store in Kalihi, I heard a therapist's advice on radio, saying “It's ok that you are not ok.”

At a time of pandemic facing us, so much worry burdening us, so much loss grieving us, it's ok that we are not ok. That's what Jesus invites us to consider when He says these comforting words in today's Gospel passage from Matthew.

**“Come to me, all who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest.”**

The Lord then continues telling us that we will gain this rest by taking his yoke upon our shoulders.

We all know, in agriculture society at the time of Jesus, yoke was the tool that the ox needed in order to plow the field. It was custom-fitted so it wouldn't chafe or bruise the neck of the precious ox.

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One yoke was often fitted over the back of two oxen. The yoke was put around their necks so that they could work together. And so, the two of them pulling together would exert a great force. When two oxen were yoked together, the burden of the load was shared by both animals. And so a yoke is something that enables us to carry out things that we otherwise couldn't do.

Just as the oxen need the yoke in order to plow the land and join an animal to the animal next to it, so we need Jesus' yoke in order to share the burden and live with hearts full of peace. "Don't try to go it alone. Don't try to face the difficulties of life all by yourself," Jesus seems to be saying to us today. "Join yourself to me and it will make all the difference in the world."

And when we do that, when we unite ourselves to the Lord, when we yoke ourselves to Jesus in such a way that everything He is becomes everything we are - the entire way we experience life will change - particularly the challenges, the difficulties, the sorrows, and the disappointments.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

None have to tell us that life is hard. And it may not be the same as we know it before the pandemic, never will be. That's ok if we are not ok with it. But that's not it all. There is more to life than what we can feel and see. And that's what Paul was getting at in today's Second Reading from his Letter to the Romans. Paul wrote about the importance of living in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

**"For if you live according to the flesh, you will die,
but if by the Spirit ... you will live."**

And so, as we celebrate the birth of our nation and our independence as a people, created and set free by God, let us live in the spirit of Jesus, working together and in peace with one another. Let us do what's most essential in life, and spend special time with God, praying and meditating on God's life-giving word.

We also need one another, working and making it through this crisis together. Jesus wants us to "yoke" life's burden with Him and know

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that there is so much more. When we yoke ourselves to him, that “more” becomes evident to us. When we yoke ourselves to him the world becomes full of beauty and possibility. When we yoke ourselves to him, we are filled with the Spirit of God, and therefore filled with life – a newness of life - a way of living and being that cannot be threatened by whatever challenges or disappointments may come our way.

My each of us live in the Spirit by staying connected to our Lord, trusting that even the greatest difficulties in life are no match for the One who is “**the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**” Amen.

Blessings,

Fr. Khanh