



## July 3, 2011 Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass... He shall banish the chariot...and the horse... the warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations."  
Zechariah 9:9-10*

Dear Friends;

Jesus came proclaiming something we call the "reign of God." These words chosen by Jesus were central to the meaning of his message and ministry. They also had political implications that would arouse the suspicion of the ruling elite and anyone who was happy with the status quo. It is a concept that would provoke fear and jealousy.

The word in the Gospels that is used in the Greek for reign is "basileia." This was also the same word for empire. At the time of Jesus the only empire recognized was the "empire of Caesar—the Roman Empire." So what Jesus was proclaiming could also be proclaimed the "Empire of God." What Jesus is proclaiming is that there is an alternate reality to the empire of this world.

Empire is a worldview, a matrix of ideas which surround us, affect us, are in us, and control us. Empire is exercised militarily, economically, socially and culturally. It is so pervasive that we often do not recognize its operation in our lives. We are imprisoned with the yoke of empire—its thinking, its power, its economics. The Old Testament refers to empire as imposed by others on Israel as a yoke that God will break as when they were slaves in Egypt.

The Roman Empire established its peace by subjecting many peoples to its emperor, legions, justice. In return for the sense of "well-being and security" it demanded tribute. Everyone had to pay by recognizing the Roman was as divine. The coins even proclaimed the emperors as gods. Empire only seeks prestige, wealth and power for those who control it. World Empire is governed by violence, fear, enslavement, hopelessness, control and always ends in destruction.

Jesus tries to convince us to live an alternate to the empires of this world. We must enter the empire of God which seeks justice for the least and lowest. To enter the Empire of God means leaving the empire of the world imposed by the rich and powerful and the chiefs of nations.

In order to enter into this reign of God means to take on a new model of social behavior. We need to stand together especially with those who cannot stand up for themselves. We can have now a fuller and more secure life for all if our attention is directed to the least and lowest. The Reign of God invites us to new values—"Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest." (Matthew 11: 29)

All of us are enslaved in one way or another to structures of the empire of this world. But we hope for liberation and already can enter in to the Reign of God by taking on the mind and heart of Jesus. We are already experiencing the reign of God when love overcomes fear; trust overcomes control; when despair gives way to hope, when we respect the dignity of others as more important than rigid legalisms; when we respect conscience over blind obedience.

God's reign is the ongoing action of the Father which calls for our responsible acceptance. No resistance can stop the reign of God from coming until it is fully here. The empires of this world will pass away and a new world is coming. The question is will we live out of the attitudes of this passing world or will we live the meekness of the world to come. Will we take on the crushing yoke of empire or the gentle burden of Jesus?

Peace,

*Fr Ron*