

FIRST READING: Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

The way of the just is smooth; the path of the just you make level. Yes, for your way and your judgments, O LORD, we look to you; Your name and your title are the desire of our souls. My soul yearns for you in the night, yes, my spirit within me keeps vigil for you; When your judgment dawns upon the earth, the world's inhabitants learn justice. O LORD, you mete out peace to us, for it is you who have accomplished all we have done. O LORD, oppressed by your punishment, we cried out in anguish under your chastising. As a woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pains, so were we in your presence, O LORD. We conceived and writhed in pain, giving birth to wind; Salvation we have not achieved for the earth, the inhabitants of the world cannot bring it forth. But your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust. For your dew is a dew of light, and the land of shades gives birth.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 102:13-14ab and 15, 16-18, 19-21

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

You, O LORD, abide forever, and your name through all generations. You will arise and have mercy on Zion, for it is time to pity her. For her stones are dear to your servants, and her dust moves them to pity.

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

The nations shall revere your name, O LORD, and all the kings of the earth your glory, When the LORD has rebuilt Zion and appeared in his glory; When he has regarded the prayer of the destitute, and not despised their prayer.

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

Let this be written for the generation to come, and let his future creatures praise the LORD: "The LORD looked down from his holy height, from heaven he beheld the earth, To hear the groaning of the prisoners, to release those doomed to die."

From heaven the Lord looks down on the earth.

Gospel:

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 15th Thursday of the Year II

From today's reading from Isaiah, one may think, from the way he wrote, that he was a Christian too. He was, of course as a prophet of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish. So close are his prophetic words to what we believe; we forget that our Christian roots are in Judaism. There is only one thing missing. He spoke of the way of the just. Who is just? God is just; we are just human. In Jesus, we receive the gift of salvation and that makes us just. As Paul put it we are justified by our faith in God and in Jesus, God's son. In this sense, justified means forgiven by God's infinite, eternal and unconditional love. God's justice is always forgiveness for those who approach God. We approach God any time we remember or think of God.

God is just a thought away. God is near to the broken hearted and those who suffer pain. God is ready to forgive and heal. God has loved us to life, faith, forgiveness and new life. Faith in God also leads to eternal life and resurrection of the dead. We cannot save ourselves; God saves us. Eternal life in ancient Judaism was to live through one's descendants. Many Jews today still believe in eternal life this way. This is why so many Jews remember the holocaust. It wasn't just the current generations who died by genocide. It was all their ancestors too.

To remember the dead for them is a form of eternal life. I add that I remember them too. When we remember our own dead we glimpse eternal life as they still live in our hearts and memories. Isaiah has introduced the notion of eternal life with God and resurrection into Judaism for the first time. Many Jews today believe in eternal life and resurrection when the Messianic Age arrives. This is their equivalent of Jesus' return to establish the Kingdom of God. For them it is the Messiah's first arrival and for us the Messiah's second coming.

When we heard the gospel's promise today, of what did we think? The promise of heaven and eternal life with God? Resurrection in the Kingdom of God? It's natural that we do. But is we just heard that, we can fall into the trap that Carl Marx set for us. Religion is the opiate of the masses. This life is brutal, painful and brief. Oh, but what will await us after we die. If this is all we've heard, the gospel isn't worth the paper on which it's printed. No, Jesus gave us the Good News as a promise when we need it the most. When we suffer, sin or sigh with our burdens. The promise of God is for the lives we live now.

Here, in the United States, we have two means of work; work and escape from work. Here, in today's gospel, Jesus has proposed a third option; rest and receive refreshment in Jesus. Remembering the presence of God in our lives can be the means of experiencing the fulfillment of the promise to us. Rest can come when we reflect upon God's abiding presence as we live life. God is near us always in our work and burdens; also our troubles trials and sin.

What is Jesus' yoke? His cross. Here he has told us to take his cross, his yoke. For by his cross, his suffering and death, took our sins, weakness and pain and died in our place. In taking Jesus' yoke we can find rest, refreshment, forgiveness and healing to try again to live in Jesus' love. We can find Jesus even in our suffering; he's there, with us, until he comes again.

May the strength of Jesus become ours.

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July 14, 2022