

Homily
July 9, 2023
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
23:12 – 31:08

Let's start a little differently. We're going to play a word game, a rhyming word game. We're going to start with the word, "meek." Who can give me a word that rhymes with meek?

Seek...leak...what? weak...Anybody else? reek...hopefully the homily won't reek.

You know, of all those words, there are two that are not only rhyming, but seem to be in our minds synonymous: "meek" and "weak."

The English words *meek* and *weak* come from old Germanic and Nordic sources. And I imagine that most of us here would consider them to mean the same thing, "lacking in power." Or we think that being meek is the demeanor of those who are weak: lacking power, one who has no choice but to be quiet, gentle, easily imposed upon, submissive.

Our First Reading and Gospel both use the word, "meek."

Let's first look at the context of each reading. And then explore "meek" through the lens of prophet and Savior.

Our reading from Zechariah – Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet with the people who'd returned to Jerusalem. They were still a vassal state of the Assyrians, who had let them go. But they longed for the restoration of the Davidic Royal Household.

In Zechariah's two brief verses we hear today of "your king." The people are to receive a just savior, a figure of meek and humble demeanor. He will ride a donkey, like royalty in the ancient Near East. But the announcement of the coming of such a king marks a tremendous departure from the view of the royal figure as being a conquering warrior. This new figure will banish the means of warfare from the land, restoring peace. And yes, as we hear this, we can almost see Jesus' own triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. They are related.

Our Gospel passage is very familiar to many of us especially because it is often heard at funerals for those who have suffered a long illness. It is the conclusion of Chapter 10, from which we have heard the last couple of weeks.

Now, the majority of Chapter 10 was addressed to the serious lack of faith of the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees. This passage, however, is a high note of hope. It is a prayer – six verses addressed to God the Father. It states clearly that the one who receives God's revelation in Christ is childlike. "The little one," it says.

And Jesus' own words are a yoke far less burdensome than the overly scrupulous religious regulations touted by the Scribes and the Pharisees. And the little one - granted this new yoke, is one meek and humble of heart. For the little one in receiving the Lord Jesus, who describes himself as meek and humble of heart, is to be meek and humble of heart.

From our two readings, my brothers and sisters, we can see that meekness – biblical and divine – is a virtue. Indeed, it is a strength that is characteristic of God himself. Because all power belongs to God, God can only enter into our lives in meekness, deliberately setting aside all pretensions of power, in Christ. If God did not do this, God would overwhelm us. We couldn't take it.

In meekness, our understanding of who Christ was and who Christ still is, is the foundation of our anthropology. That is, what we think it means to be human. For a Christian, "meek" does not mean "weak" because the meekness of Christ does not emerge from a lack of power. We see that throughout the Gospel. He is not without power. It's how he uses it that is "meek and humble of heart."

And so, my brothers and sisters, for the followers of Jesus, meekness is not a surrender. Meekness as a strength does not need to scream. Meekness is not passivity. It is a ***sureness of presence*** that spurns aggression. Meekness in the ancient Greek word used here is "the quality of not being impressed with one's own importance."

Meekness is of God. Like the sun in the sky securely settled into itself, meekness shines in sure love upon the good and the bad. Such biblical and divine meekness flies in the face of our culture's emphasis on self-reliance, doesn't it? It also flies in the face of raised voices, arrogance and dominance over others through thinking, words, even weapons.

Jesus says, "Take this yoke upon you and learn from me. Be as I am, meek and humble of heart." We are called to live the meekness of Christ, our Savior. It is the very strength of God, which will manifest itself in our lives.