

July 5th, 2020: 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Year A

First Reading: Zechariah 9.9-10

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 145.1-2,8-9,10-11,13cd-14 (R. 1b)

Second Reading: Romans 8.9, 11-13

Gospel: Matthew 11.25-30

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

“There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate [t]he Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be.” These are the words of Fulton Sheen, who was ordained a Catholic priest in 1919 and who went on to become a bishop who was well known for his preaching and his work on radio and television (See: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/33546-there-are-not-one-hundred-people-in-the-united-states>).

Though Sheen said these words about the American public quite a while ago, I believe they are relevant for us in present-day Canada. In other words, I am quite certain there are lots of Canadians who have strong feelings of animosity towards the Catholic Church and think things like *how can this institution led by a bunch of celibate men tell others about what is the true purpose of human existence? About a right to life? About a proper ordering of the family and human sexuality? About what is virtuous and what is sinful?*

Many people these days believe that these sorts of questions about God, salvation, life, family, virtue, sin and so forth should be left to individuals to figure out for themselves. They may see the Catholic Church as an oppressive institution that is constantly telling people what they should NOT do rather than one that is aiming to promote their happiness. Thus, they may be bitterly opposed to the Church.

So, let's consider how to address this opposition. For one, it is crucial to always keep in mind that the Catholic Church is a divine institution.

We know that both Church clergy and the laity are made up of sinful human beings but the true head of the Church is Jesus Christ, who founded the Church.

Secondly, during his public ministry Jesus gave important authority to Peter and the other apostles to be visible leaders of the Church, and this authority has passed on throughout the ages to successive popes and to bishops around the world

(see: <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/scripture-and-tradition/jesus-and-the-new-testament/who-do-you-say-that-i-am-names-for-jesus/jesus-head-of-the-church/>).

And despite the weaknesses and sinful frailties of the Church's leaders and members, the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church. As the Risen Jesus told his disciples before he ascended into heaven, "...remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20b). So, we know there is a profound relationship between Christ and his Church, as the Church lives in Christ and for Christ. It is because of this profound relationship between Christ and the Church that we call the Church the Mystical Body of Christ (see: <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/scripture-and-tradition/jesus-and-the-new-testament/who-do-you-say-that-i-am-names-for-jesus/jesus-head-of-the-church/>).

So, as we gather here today for Holy Mass we know that it is here that we truly encounter the Risen Lord. We encounter him in each other and we encounter him in a particularly profound way in the Most Holy Eucharist. Furthermore, we encounter the Lord in the Scriptures and in the prayers of the Mass – we hear his voice and his teachings!

For instance, consider some of these words from today's opening prayer: "O God...fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness." Do these sound like the words of someone trying to oppress people and keep them from being happy?

I would say the opposite is true. God wants us to be happy, he wants us to flourish! Now, some might hear the words "slavery to sin" and think this is an exaggeration. But let's consider some of the unfortunate trends that are happening today. For instance, consider drug and alcohol abuse.

Many people abuse illegal drugs and alcohol in hopes of relaxing and having fun. But getting high and drunk are sinful activities for when people do this, they are not serving God and others but instead are seeking self-absorbed pleasure.

What's more, people can get addicted to these substances in which they abuse them compulsively. It is estimated that approximately 21% of Canada's population (about 6 million people) will experience substance addiction during their lifetime; we must keep these struggling souls in our prayers. And we know that people can overcome alcohol and drug addiction. (see: <https://ontario.cmha.ca/addiction-and-substance-use-and-addiction/>)!

Another form of enslavement is the use of pornography. In 2019, Pornhub - the world's largest porn website, was used approximately 42 billion times. And during the pandemic, Pornhub has sought to get more people "hooked" on their sinful service by granting temporary free access in some places. This sinister scheme has worked as reportedly even more people are viewing porn. We know that porn is evil as viewers turn away from God and their family and friends (see: <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2020/03/as-church-expands-online-footprint-during-virus-so-does-porn/>).

Another struggle for some is greed and dishonesty. For instance, the Retail Council of Canada recently reported that shoplifting accounts for up to \$5 billion a year in losses for retail stores across the country, and Statistics Canada says that billions of dollars are lost due to tax cheating. These are disturbing numbers, for sure (see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/crime-shoplifting-court-justice-delays-1.5153828>; <https://torontosun.com/news/national/problem-of-tax-evasion-challenging-as-20-of-canadians-willing-to-risk-it-study>).

Other sins that people can get enslaved to include holding grudges, laziness, using the Lord's name in vain, and gossiping. As I talk about these sins, I certainly do not want come off as self-righteous as I personally know how enslaving sin can be. But, more importantly, I also know the freedom and joy that come from experiencing the grace and power of Jesus Christ as he transforms us through the Church's sacraments.

We are called to a life of steady discipleship – this does not mean perfection as we still can fall into sin but when we do fall, we must sincerely seek the Lord’s mercy and try again. A genuine commitment to follow the Lord is so much more fulfilling than being enslaved to sin but we need Christ’s help with this! And the fact that Jesus helps us really comes out in our Gospel reading today, as he says “[t]ake my yoke upon you, and learn from me...[f]or my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt. 11:29-30).

In Jesus’ day, a yoke was a wooden harness, like a collar, which was used to link two oxen together in order to plow the fields. And, if you recall from last Sunday’s readings, Jesus talked about putting wood on our shoulders when he told us to take up our cross and follow him (Mt 10:38). So when we hear Jesus talking about a yoke he is continuing this image of the cross, and saying that being his disciple involves carrying the cross (see Pitre, 14th Sun. OT, MRE).

As I have talked about today, we can definitely fall into slavery to sin. And yet Jesus is calling us to renounce sin and unite ourselves to that saving Cross through which he destroyed sin – we do this through prayer and the sacraments, particularly Confession and Holy Communion. Jesus doesn’t ask us to carry the cross by ourselves – he promises to be with us every step of the way. This doesn’t mean that we won’t experience the pain of anxiety, fear, and sin but it does mean we are not enslaved to it. Instead, we are crucified with Christ and so our lives are no longer our own (Gal 2:19b-20a) – our lives are in his hands and we trust that he will bring us to the resurrection. This is our path to freedom, this is our path to joy, and this is our path to eternal gladness (Pitre,

14th Sun. OT, MRE)!

So, indeed, Jesus is gentle and humble in heart and in him alone do we find rest for our souls (Mt 11:29). You, Jesus, are our King and our God, and we will praise your name forever!