Lectio Divina – 14th Sunday of the Year A

Matthew’s Gospel (in brief)

* Composed between 80-90 CE
* Author is anonymous, but named as ‘Matthew the tax collector’ by later tradition.
* Written in scholarly ‘synagogue’ Greek.
* Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
* Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: “When Jesus had finished….”:
  1. Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy
  2. 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
  3. 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
  4. **3rd: 13 Parable Discourse**
  5. 4th: 18 Community Discourse
  6. 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
* May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.

Matthew 10:25-30: things to notice

* This Sunday’s Gospel begins the middle section of Matthew’s Gospel. The focus of for the next four Sundays is about unfolding the mystery of God’s Kingdom:
  1. Revelation of the Kingdom to the simple
  2. Parable about the Sower
  3. Parable about the Sower, continued
  4. Parables about the Treasure in the Field, the fine pearl, the fishing net
* The Gospel reading is in 3 parts:
  1. Thanksgiving for revelation
  2. content of the revelation – Jesus
  3. Invitation to revelation
* **Part 1** :Gospel begins with Jesus joyful exclamation: “blessed are you/I praise you/I bless you, Father”. A typical Jewish *beraka* (blessing) formula. Similar formulas are used at Mass – during the preparation of the bread and wine; - during the Sabbath meal and during the Passover meal.
* ‘Father’ – the difference Jesus introduces is to talk of God in very familiar terms as Abba (Father, Daddy) - not, for example, Lord, God, etc and it occurs 5 times in 3 verses!
* ‘hiding these things from the learned and clever’ – a reference to the scribes and Pharisees
* ‘revealing’ – indicates divine communication.
* ‘mere children’ – the literal translation is ‘babes’. It means the simple, uneducated people.
* ‘for that it what it pleased you to do’ – emphasising God’s choice of Jesus as His revelation.
* **Part 2**: ‘Everything has been entrusted to me’: A statement about Jesus as the total (full, complete) ‘revelation’ of the Father.
* ‘No one knows the Son except the Father…No one knows the Father except the son’ – Jesus and the Father live in a communion of mutual knowledge and love, each abiding in the other.
* ‘and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ – those to whom the son chooses to reveal the Father are drawn into the same communion of Knowledge and Love.
* **Part 3**: ‘Come to me’ – the invitation to revelation, to come to know the Father through the Son.
* ‘All who labour and are overburdened’ – all those oppressed in some way. In the context of Matthew’s community, it implies those who fell burdened by the demands of the Jewish Law, and those who find themselves persecuted for NOT following the Law. It can also mean those who are burdened by themselves – by fear, anxiety, the care about power, wealth and status, etc.
* ‘I will give you rest’ – with faith and trust in Jesus one can become free of worry and anxiety and the need to care so much about power, wealth and status because our trust is in Jesus not in what we make, or have or own or are given by others.
* ‘Shoulder my yoke’ – In Matthew’s context this is probably a contrast between the heavy yoke of the Law and the Pharisees (many obligations to fulfil in order to win mercy from God) and the ‘easy’ yoke and ‘light’ burden of learning from a gentle and humble Jesus – not a fearsome, unforgiving God. It is a call to discipleship.
* A traditional team of oxen in Jesus’ time was usually formed by one older and one younger oxen. They walk and work together. They were not driven by whips, but by the words of the driver of the team. Mark O’Brien points out that a yoke forms a ‘team’ out of the animals in it. He suggests that maybe we can also understand this image as Jesus’ willingness to become a team (a partner) with us. “Paradoxically, what looks to be the oddest team of all – myself the sinner and the son of God – becomes the perfect team.” Jesus and I are bound together by the yoke of knowledge and love of the Father. Jesus works with his disciples (enters into communion with them) so that they can learn who the Father is and enter into communion (share life) with him.

The Liturgical Context

The Sunday Gospels Sundays 14-17: The Mystery of God’s Kingdom. Beginning today with the revelation to the simple. The next three Sundays are ‘parable sermons’: the parable of the sower and the darnel (15 & 16the Sundays), parables about the Kingdom (treasure, pearls, dragnet – 17th Sunday).

Liturgical Setting for this Sunday

The first reading from the prophet Zechariah also begins will a joyful shout of praise welcoming the victorious, yet humble, king who ends wars and brings peace and establishes a new kingdom which reaches to the ends of the earth.

Those hearing both the first reading and the Gospel cannot help but be struck by how closely Jesus resembles the king whose praises Zechariah sings.

Very often the Sunday readings are arranged in just such a fashion: that what is spoken about in the first reading is fulfilled in the person of Jesus in the Gospel reading.

Reflection

The Gospel today is a joyful, ecstatic outburst of feeling by Jesus.

Matthew’s community must have been deeply troubled by the fact that the ‘learned and clever’ religious leaders of their day did not accept the message of Jesus. Surely they, of all people, should have been able to recognise the truth. But in this passage, Matthew explains that it is not from a position of knowledge or power that one recognises who Jesus is. Rather, it is from an attitude of openness and simplicity, such as we often find in children.

Matthew also makes the point that Jesus does not approach us like a warlord, with threats of punishment, but in humility and gentleness.

The tone of the reading is set by Jesus’ warm and intimate address of ‘Abba’ (Father) which occurs five times in this short passage. This intimate relationship is characterised by God’s entrusting all of things to the Son, and the Son in turn revealing them (entrusting them?) to those who have faith. These, in turn, are drawn into intimate relationship with God.

The rules and laws of religious leaders in Jesus’ day often added to the burden experienced by those regarded as simple and sinful. Whereas Jesus always tried to lift burdens from people.

Jesus invitation in today’s Gospel is for everyone. It could be an invitation for us to look at our lives and ask what burdens we impose on others. Do our concerns, anxieties, our need for power, wealth and status, exact a high price from others and ourselves?

Are we a burden or a blessing for each other? What can we do to make life easier for each other - to lift the burdens and share the load?