



**Homily of the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024**  
**Basilica of St Francis of Assisi**  
**Mons. Mario Vaccari, ofm, bishop**



Is 26:7-9.12.16-19

Psalm 101 (102): *The people whom You have created bless Your name.*

Mt 11:28-30

In the passage from the prophet Isaiah that we have heard, we can perceive the almost feverish search for God: "*At night my soul longs for You, in the morning my spirit seeks You within me*" (v. 9). The poetic image strikes and reminds us of our tireless and continuous desire for the infinite. But this restlessness, if there is faith, can find refreshment in the peace that God offers us and which is the messianic gift *par excellence*. In fact, the promise "*Lord, You will grant us peace*" (v. 12) seems to echo Jesus' affirmation: "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you*" (Jn 14:27). The Lord's commitment to his faithful has reached its fulfilment in the offering of the Son. And this suggestion also appears to be revived by the final verses, where the tribulations of the people of Israel, who suffer like "*a pregnant woman who is about to give birth*" (v. 17), seem to correspond to the "*pangs of childbirth*" in which "*all creation groans*" (Rom 8:22). All creatures desire to recognize themselves and to be reunited with their Creator: "*Your dew is bright dew*" (v. 19).

The Psalm enables us to pray: "*The people You created bless Your name.*". Praise springs from this awareness:

*"The Lord looked out from the top of His sanctuary, from heaven he looked down on the earth, to listen to the groaning of the prisoner, to free those condemned to death; that the name of the Lord may be proclaimed in Zion and His praise in Jerusalem."*

Everything seems to point to an end time, and the creation of a new people, which gathers all peoples into itself. Israel, which was that poor man on whom God's merciful gaze is placed, is now made up of all peoples: "*when the peoples and kingdoms gather together to serve the Lord*" (ver.23).

And here, in verse 20, is the image of the Lord's universal mercy: "*The Lord looked out from the top of his sanctuary, from heaven he looked upon the earth, to hear the sigh of the prisoner, to free those condemned to death*"

The image of God who appears is beautiful, but we know that not only did He look out, He looked..., but He came, He pitched His tent amongst ours, He became one of us. – "*To listen to the sighing of the prisoner, to free those condemned to death*", says the psalmist. And we think of Jesus who refers to Himself, in the synagogue of Nazareth, the words of Isaiah: "*He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the*

*captives..., to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". – We have had everything necessary to see the fulfilment of the prophetic announcements: a hope for the People of God: "their offspring will live secure in Your presence": this is precisely what is achieved for us, living safely in the presence of the Father and the Lord Jesus.*

We can now understand more deeply the invitation that Jesus addresses to us today as his disciples: "*Come unto me*".

It is a direct invitation to us, in which the invitation of Sirach 51:23-30 echoes: "*... Come, come closer, you who are without education, take up residence in my school ... I opened My mouth and spoke: Buy it without money...Let your soul delight in the mercy of the Lord*".

An invitation in which we also listen again to our call, come, *follow Me*, in which Jesus asked us to leave *home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the Kingdom of God (Lk 18:29)*.

Wisdom is addressed to those who have no education, it is the wisdom of the poor, it is the wisdom of the Son, it is the wisdom that is the fruit of love and that knows those who love. It is even this wisdom that invites you to dwell with her. There is a thirst for this wisdom; This wisdom is gratuitous, it is not acquired by particular experiences, by virtue, by wisdom, by doctrine. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Corinthians: "*While the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles; 24but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" [1 Cor 1:22-24]

The invitation that Jesus addresses to us is to go to Him as a person, that is, to meet Him in His flesh in His body, to desire to touch His wounds like Thomas. Jesus is the wisdom of God. That God whom no one has ever seen, he revealed to us precisely by becoming flesh. That is, the story of Jesus, that story of Jesus that culminates with the gift of life, is the revelation of the invisible God.

There are many other wisdoms in the world. But God is yet another wisdom: he is the flesh of Christ, the wisdom of the cross (1 Cor 1:24). A God crucified for love, who is the last of all, that is truly the wisdom of God, who enters where there is no God, in our opinion. Therefore, it is precisely on the Cross that God reveals His infinity, in His extreme smallness, in His vulnerability as a consequence of love.

An invitation for us, therefore, who are *weary and oppressed*. It is the effort to become 'new men': the effort of having to be, of searching, of growing; the fatigue of observing the right things, the fatigue of loving well. The fatigue of a journey of formation in the Fraternity of Friars Minor. Fatigue represents the typical aspect of man, which is not simply nature: "This is how I am!" No, it is what he can become through work, free will, freedom; and it costs effort. Not only does it cost effort, it costs oppression because one struggles to achieve the fullness of life, but this goal is not achievable by one's own strength. Now, no norm, no training, however useful and necessary, can give you life and love.

Jesus says: All you who are oppressed by all these things, ***come unto me and I will give you rest***. Rest recalls the rest of the seventh day, the Sabbath which is the fulfilment of creation. If you go to him, he gives you rest, fulfilment. And rest is the seventh day that God rested. The fulfilment of man is God; He gives you the very love of the Father and the Son. We know that Jesus makes us his disciples so that we can *'be with him* and certainly also *to send us to preach'* (Mk 3:14)

Jesus says: I have another yoke, it is my yoke. So not that yoke you know of the law, *take my yoke*. It is the yoke of his meekness and humility; it is

the yoke of his love; it is the yoke of the love that he has for us. And since the yoke also joins two, you take mine, so that we are two on the same yoke. Christ's yoke is the cross, where he joined himself with each one of us, with all our weakness and frailty. He bore the very hard yoke of all evil and all fatigue. We can take his yoke, he pulls and we are pulled by this yoke.

It is our identity: to be a Christian is to be co-crucified with Christ. It is the language of the Apostle Paul who says: "*From now on no one should trouble me: I bear the stigmata of Jesus on my body*" (Galatians 6:17). To be with Christ in His glory, we must first adhere to his holocaust in order to feel one with Him, who died on Calvary.

This yoke is clearly love, it is what unites Father and Son: "*Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end*" (Jn 13:1). Love is sweet for those who love, but it is also heavy if they are not loved. In fact, this love, which is also the infinite sweetness of God, is also death on the Cross because it is not loved, indeed it is a love betrayed (Jesus washes the feet of Judas who betrays Him). If we take up the yoke of his love, that is, we also love him, we enter into the sweetness of life and love, we come out of death. This yoke is learned from Him, that is, by learning to love; We are children, we are loved, we learn to love. And He who loves fulfills the whole law, he does it with ease. It is the yoke of the leper that Francis embraced and then what was bitter for him turns into sweetness: "*And as I moved away from them, what seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body.*" (Testament of St. Francis)

The first thing to learn in order to accept the yoke of Jesus, to be able to love as he loves us, is meekness. In reality, in Greek, meekness is the quality of the governor who is lenient, of one who does not let authority weigh heavily, does not judge immediately but has patience. God is meek, his authority does not weigh, because his authority is pure service. This is the meekness of God that we have come to know from Genesis onwards towards a rebellious humanity that uses violence.

The second attribute is *humility*. Humility is the fundamental quality of love, love is always humble: it esteems the other superior to itself, even to the point of giving one's life for the other. It is recognizing oneself in one's own truth and smallness. It is the virtue that Francis sings for sister water because it always reaches the last places, always below: "*Praised be my Lord, for water, which is very useful, humble, precious and chaste....*" Without humility there is no love, there is only arrogance. In Mary it is the recognition of her own lowliness that has been 'guarded' by the Lord and that makes me praise and magnify the Lord.

God's wisdom is *meek and humble*, it is the wisdom of love.

In Jesus, God who is great, who is transcendent, who is all you want, truly makes Himself small to make room for us. He becomes small because so that we may grow.

*For freely you have received freely give.* This is the beginning of the mission.

But let us nevertheless remember what Francis tells us in the Letter to the Faithful: But few are willing to receive him and be saved through him, although. *His yoke is easy and his burden light* (cf. Mt 11:30).

St. Benedict also teaches us:

*[From the Liturgy of the Feast of Saint Benedict]*

*Fear without fear,  
In the abandonment of his whole being,  
To have nothing dearer than Christ,  
**Serving the One Master**  
**Whose yoke makes one free :**  
Thus, in **the sweetness** of the Spirit,  
Benedict surrenders himself.*