

[Readings: Zech. 9:9-10; Psalm 145; Rom. 8:9, 11-13; Matt 11:25-30]

You don't have to watch the evening news to find out what people are worried about. Think back on the past year. The bereaved family carried their loss to the church. The man or woman seeking an annulment, the teenagers anxious about their lives, the families in financial crisis, the depressed worker who could hardly function on the job anymore, the man or woman who felt rejected and denied by God and offended by the Church, the one who'd just been diagnosed with cancer. Senior Citizens still wondering if it is truly safe to come back to Sunday Mass without catching COVID-19.

People have all sorts of troubles with their relationships, their health, their careers, and their bank accounts. They worry about moral choices and what God thinks of them, too. They wonder if anything they do has meaning anymore. They suspect sometimes that they have made irredeemable mistakes.

A young, single stockbroker who'd been raised in a Catholic family was in trouble, and he knew it. He made a lot of money and enjoyed a fabulous lifestyle, but none of that mattered anymore. He drank too much, and it was starting to affect his career. It had already cost him many significant relationships. He was lonely. He was full of self-hatred. He didn't know what else to do, so one Saturday night he stumbled into the nearest Catholic church, something he hadn't done in a long time.

He didn't come for anything in particular -- impulse and buried memory had brought him there. He sat in the pew uncomfortably and looked into the face of a small boy in the arms of his father in the pew ahead of him. The child was smiling at him over the father's shoulder. He returned the smile painfully. Mass was in progress, and the stockbroker had arrived in time for the Gospel: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Rest! Tears sprang up in the troubled man's eyes. Wouldn't it be astonishing, wonderful, incredible, to find rest somewhere? To find it, so simply and unreservedly, in the embrace of Jesus?

The small boy smiled at him again from the forward pew. The man took it as a sign from God. He wept, rocking and softly repeating those saving words: "Come to me, come to me."

This story is true. The stockbroker later became a priest and is now preaching the same Gospel he once heard so clearly. But it's a true story in more ways than one. These words from Jesus are immensely powerful, and we cannot discount how important they could be to someone, or many someones. Maybe even us!

So then what about us? Can we share in this sweet intimacy, knowing in our very flesh and blood the love of the Father and the Son? Jesus cultivates our desire for this. He hints that we can share in this intimacy. The Son can reveal to us the Father. If He wishes. And He DOES wish it!

This Independence Day weekend, we reflect on where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. Although our original foundation on Christian principles has not kept our nation from the scourges of slavery, nativism and civil war, thanks be to God, U.S. citizens -- through much effort -- overcame them. Today, we find ourselves facing different national challenges, but no less destructive: the COVID-19 pandemic, a fractured economy, a divided nation, segregated races. We pray and sing, "God bless America," and one church marquee sign controversially says, "God will not bless America when we legalize sin."

But, as always, God provides his grace in any age: Thanks to technological advances and the proliferation of pro-life apostolates, secular and religious, the human dignity of a person from conception to natural death is the force behind so many organizations and apostolates. The majority of U.S. citizens now consider abortion morally wrong, and in some states this conviction has helped usher in bold new laws to protect unborn children and their mothers. There are voices in all levels of politics and the Church who are working for authentic immigration reform while protecting national sovereignty. In spite of violent protests and brutality, legislators are working to combat the racism that still pervades our country. Voices of reason, clarity and charity can rise above the shrill and serve as vehicles for constructive debate.

Let us pray that this nation will return to the foundation of our country: One nation, under God. And to put into practice the words, "In God We Trust."

I found three prayers appropriate for this holiday weekend. One is for us, one is for us individually, and one is for our country. And so, we pray:

Lord Jesus, we do wish to know the Father. How often in our sorrow have we longed to see the countenance of God? How much we have desired to taste God's own communion of love. And now, Jesus, You invite us into this communion. You tell us, dear Jesus, to rest in You.

So many of us understand the burdens of the human condition. We know heartbreak, death, suffering, the brevity of our days. We distract ourselves, work as hard as we can, to forget who we are. And Whose we are.

You want us to rest in You. We are to take up Your easy yoke and plow the fields of our heart with Your merciful love.

It is harder to rest in You, dear Lord, than you might think.

Your yoke may be easy, Your burden may be light.

But our burden has been heavy. It is the burden of sin and death. As St. Paul says, the burden of living according to the flesh, instead of according to the Spirit.

What joys and blessings You have revealed to us, Your little ones.

Make us Your little ones once again.

#### A PRAYER OF HOPE

Lord Jesus, I pray this day for strength, because there are times when things get tough and I feel like quitting. Lord Jesus, I ask this day for the comforting reassurance of Your love, because there are times when people fail me, and I am tempted to lose hope. Lord Jesus, I seek this day for Your light to guide my steps, because there are times when life is confusing and difficult, and I lose my way. Help me, O Lord, to pick up the pieces, wipe my tears, face the sun, and start over again, for all is possible when I place my faith and trust in You, my Saving God.

#### A PRAYER FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

God our Father, Giver of life, we entrust the United States of America to Your loving care. You are the Rock on which this nation was founded. You alone are the true source of our cherished rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Reclaim this land for Your glory and dwell among Your people. Send Your Spirit to touch the hearts of our nation's leaders. Open their minds to the great worth of human life and the responsibilities that accompany human freedom. Remind Your people that true happiness is rooted in seeking and doing Your Holy Will. Through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of our land, grant us the courage to reject the "culture of death" and to embrace and proclaim the Gospel of Life. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. God, truly bless America! AMEN!