

Homily **14th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C** (7.7.19)

I found myself reflecting on the readings this week and saying to myself, 'I found the Gospel rather dull', but the words of Isaiah shot out at me. You know, it's beautiful. Isaiah nearly always writes beautifully, but this prose is almost on the edge of being poetic. It's such a powerful prophecy and poetic image.

But there was one image stuck out for me, and it brought back a memory I'd long forgotten from the 1970s. It was a friend's wife who had just had a baby and they came to visit me, and I wasn't shocked more than surprised when she just flung open her blouse and started breastfeeding the baby in front of me. And my dad, who I always thought was very prudish, put me right. I went to him and I said,

"Ah, I was taken aback by that, dad,"

and he said,

"Oh, that's nothing,"

he said - remember, he was born in 1921 ... back-to-back houses - He said,

"In the summer, all the women in our street used to sit on the doorstep breastfeeding and talking to one another."

[laughter]

There's somebody remembers what it was like, you must be old [chuckle]. So in my dad's day it was normal, and it suddenly hit me, that story, that that was also normal for Isaiah obviously. Otherwise where would he have got such a profound image? He was used to women walking around openly breastfeeding their children, and this inspiration came to him to express the love of God, and like that of a woman for her child, weaning a child.

But the emphasis isn't on that, really, in the reading - although, I think Isaiah is one of those tucked away stories where we miss so easily the fact that there's lots of feminine images in the Old Testament and the New about God - but the emphasis for Isaiah in his prophecy is this emphasis about **'rejoicing'**. Again, another word that doesn't immediately spring to mind when we think of religion and our faith, but it's the rejoicing of liberation, the rejoicing of being freed from captivity. It's the powerful image that can even affect all of us, not caught up in world events, but in our own personal tragedies when we're liberated from them. And Jesus, in the Gospel, mentions rejoicing, and it's very interesting, because the Disciples come back rejoicing because they had power, and He sort of rebukes them for that, doesn't He? He says,

"Don't rejoice because you have power to do this, but rejoice rather that your names are written in Heaven."

In other words, rejoice because you have been liberated in God's love.

And then, of course, to cap it off, we have St. Paul about boasting, and it links, I think, very much with our understanding of what we should be doing

in our faith, because we're all prone to boasting. It gives us points against somebody else, and especially if we don't like them and we like to say our achievements were better than theirs. And St. Paul says,

"The only thing I boast about is in the cross of Christ."

How could you boast in that? Because he's saying to us, isn't he?

"The only way you can rejoice [boast] is by submitting to God's love as the Saviour did in offering your life as Christ did."