

My Yoke is Easy and My Burden Light

Fourteenth Week of Ordinary Time – July 9, 2017 - Matthew 11:25-30

In the gospel this week, Jesus says, **“Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”** It might be difficult to understand the context of this message in the midst of the burdens that many of you, your family or friends have experienced. It is even more difficult when we are facing a serious diagnosis, a recurring illness or the loss of someone we love. There is nothing “light” about any of these situations.

The context of this particular gospel gives us an opportunity to understand that what Jesus is referring to is not the burdens of life but the burden of belief. Jesus is saying that to have a significant relationship with God is easy. It does not take a PhD in theology or a wise and learned person to understand that God loves us. **“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to little ones.”** Jesus is affirming that belief in God and the promise of eternal life is open to everyone including those who might be unable to comprehend sophisticated, complex theology.

At the time of Christ, the scribes and Pharisees had a strong legalistic structure of laws, practices and traditions that were a very burdensome “yoke” for the average person, especially the poor to follow. The practice of following the “Law” became a means to an end under a strict code of observance to these practices. To be holy was to practice these rituals with precision. We might call this overt piety today. The Church, in her 2000 year history, has been guilty of this same approach to a relationship with God. Sometimes this piety is practiced to a point of superstition. In today’s gospel, Jesus says that the heavy burden imposed by the leadership of His time is not the way to God. The same message stands today. Jesus is available and present to every person at any time. There are no strings attached. All that is required is belief.

Jesus is not replacing the Law or the commandments. Rather, Jesus comes to fulfill the Law which is the Law of Love. Jesus’ Law of Love must be coupled with a desire to follow the will of God. To love God is to know God through a direct, personal and profound relationship with Christ. In so doing, Jesus’ “yoke” is not a place of burdensome compliance to rules or superstitious practices but a genuine belief in a loving and forgiving God who restores hope and makes all things new as we sometimes struggle with the burdens and hardships of everyday life.

Blessings!



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