

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A (2023)

'My yoke is easy, and my burden light.'

We all have problems at times, and I am no exception. I remember one occasion some years ago, when I was facing a very serious problem that I did not know how to handle. In my anxiety, at about 9.00 pm one evening, I went into the chapel and prayed with all my heart, 'Jesus take this problem away from me, please.'

I remained in the chapel for perhaps 20 to 30 minutes, and during that time somehow my prayer changed from 'Jesus take this problem away' to 'Jesus, give me the strength and wisdom and courage that I need to face this problem and deal with it in a good way.'

When I left the chapel, the problem was still there but somehow, I felt more peaceful and stronger in my ability to face it. I felt reassured that Jesus was with me and that that he would help me in whatever lay ahead.

I think that is what Jesus is saying to all of us in those beautiful words in today's Gospel, 'come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest'. Jesus is saying, 'I won't take all your problems away, but I will be with you in the difficult times and I will help you to carry the load of your challenges and difficulties.'

Indeed, Jesus says, 'I want you to yoke yourself to me'. 'Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

A yoke is a traditional farming implement that we don't see today. It goes back to the time before motor vehicles when heavy loads were carried on carts pulled by animals. The yoke was a wooden crossbeam that was put over a pair of animals, say oxen, to enable them to pull the heavy load together. Through the yoke, the weight of the load was shared equally by the two animals and it was much easier for them to pull the load forward.

And that is Jesus for us. He doesn't take away the load we must carry, but he says, 'yoke yourself to me, and I will carry the load with you. We can share the weight together.'

An interesting thing about a yoke is that it is quite heavy – it is an added weight placed on the shoulders of an ox, but the added weight is small compared to the benefit it brings, enabling the animals to share the load.

Likewise, the yoke of Jesus does carry some weight – we have to get up on a Sunday and go to Church, we have to try to live by the commandments he gave us, to help our fellow men and women, to find time for prayer, to act with justice, to love, etc.

We take on a weight, a responsibility, when we yoke ourselves to Jesus but compared to the benefits of having Jesus with us, sharing our burdens, carrying our load with us, the weight of his yoke is indeed easy and light.

In our Mass today, hear Jesus saying to you, ‘come to me, and I will give you rest.’

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