

Rev. Kevin V. Madigan
Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel-St. Thomas More, NYC
July 5, 2020, Streaming Mass
14th Sunday of Year A Mt 11:25-30

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, I will give you rest....For My yoke is easy and My burden light." It is one of the ironies of contemporary life that while we have so many "time-saving" and "labor-saving" devices at our disposal, we seem even more harried and, yes, even more burdened with the pressures and responsibilities of everyday life than generations before. While there is a tendency to romanticize the past as having been more peaceful, even idyllic, it does seem that today there is less stability, less security, and less consensus about what it is we have to do and how to do it, that juggling the demands of career and family are ever more stressful. The words of Jesus in today's Gospel, then, are certainly welcome, so let's examine what He is saying.

Our consumer-oriented society counsels us that it is by acquiring this or ingesting that, by wearing this fashion item or sporting that accessory, by driving that car or living at that address, by getting that job or pursuing that career, that we are going to find happiness. So often, all this can be just about proving something about who we are to others, maybe even to ourselves, with the result that we are just ratcheting up the pace in the treadmill of life. It can become a life "keeping up with the Joneses." We can wear ourselves out in the pursuit of these things. This is the burden we impose upon our selves. What Jesus promises is a lighter burden, a more authentic life, because it is based on what is real, and not just on the trends of the most recent market analysis.

Jesus invites us to take His "yoke" upon our shoulders and to learn from Him. This was a traditional expression for a rabbi, a religious teacher, taking on a new student, a disciple. But what was the significance of the "yoke?" In the agricultural society in which Jesus lived, the "yoke" was the wooden beam laid on the shoulders of two oxen to enable them to work together in pulling a plow through a field or in dragging some heavy weight; it harnessed their energy. Usually a young inexperienced ox was paired with a veteran ox that would break it in, training the younger one to be responsive to the farmer's direction. Otherwise they might go in two different directions. The yoke on the two oxen's shoulders distributed the weight; it produced a shared burden, making it easier to do the job. Jesus is saying "Be yoked to Me; be joined up with Me, and I, walking beside you, will share your load. You won't have to drag that weight all by yourself. I am there beside you to help you do it." Jesus does not promise to remove all the burdens of life from our shoulders; He promise to help us cope with

them.

Jesus says, "Learn from Me." In the original language, this learning is not something of the head, something theoretical, something one can learn from a book. It is the kind of knowledge that an apprentice picks up from observing a skilled craftsman at his trade. So, it is by looking at, observing, reflecting on the way that Jesus lived his life, how He dealt with people, how He faced adversity, that we in time become more adept, more skilled in the task of living our own lives. Jesus has something very important to teach us, if we take the time to look at Him, to observe Him, to reflect on His life.

And what can he teach? He says, "I am meek and humble of heart." This is not invitation to be a "door-mat" or a "pushover." In the whole Bible, there are only two individuals who are described as "meek." One is Jesus and the other is Moses--Moses who confronted the Pharaoh of Egypt and led his people out of slavery, and Jesus who challenged the religious leaders of His day. The one who is "meek" is the one who is not driven by the forces of their ego, or the lusts of their heart, or the need to have to prove they count for something, but the one who is "meek" can stand up for what is right and pursue the path that leads to integrity of life.

Jesus is "humble of heart," and that is something we can learn to be as well. The word humble has a connection with the Latin word "humus" which means "earth." The person who is humble is the one who has his or her feet firmly planted on the ground. We might say that person is "grounded," that they are not pulled this way and that, because they know who they are and what they are all about. There is no pretense about them. St. Thomas Aquinas once said, "Humilitas est veritas," "Humility is Truth." If that be right, I do not put myself down and deny my talents or abilities, nor am I a fake, pretending to be what I am not. Humility is truth. I am what I am.

And finally, Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, and My burden light." The word "easy" is somewhat difficult to translate. Here it means that the "yoke" Jesus provides is the one that is most useful, most serviceable; it is the one that is best suited to get the job done, the job of living a good, truly fulfilling life. It is certainly easier, more useful, more serviceable than some of the burdens we impose upon ourselves, by the sort of things we get ourselves involved in. So, of all the things that we can find ourselves "yoked to" or "hooked up with," it is our association with the Jesus that will work for what is our genuine good. Consequently, our burden is lightened because we have chosen correctly and Jesus is walking with us.

The yoke of Jesus offers is not one that He imposes on us, but one that He

carries with us. He invites us to be “yoked” to him, linked with him, learning from Him and taking advantage of His help. In time the burdens we inevitably have to bear will become lighter, because He helps us carry that load. We never have to walk alone.

In a few moments we will welcome the risen Jesus in the Eucharist. He comes with the invitation to each of us to walk with Him, assuring us that we never will have to walk alone, that He is there to help us carry out burden, to lighten the load. Let us pray that we can accept that invitation.