

## Jesus Our Yokemate

*Jesus said, "Come to me, all you 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." (Matthew 11: 28-30)*

I love my day off. I love having free time to do something fun or take a nap or watch a movie. But, you know, I also love a long, hard day of work! Sometimes my favorite day of the week is the day that I work the hardest. When I finish a rigorous day and most things have gone well, I can go to bed knowing that I did some good that day.

In the passage above, Jesus invites us to become His yoke-mate. Although in other places in the Gospels he invites us simply to rest and relax with him, here he is inviting us to join him in plowing the field and tending to the soil. He is inviting us to labor with him, and that is a wonderful grace and privilege.

We should never fall into the temptation of thinking that we can earn our own salvation—that we can work our way into heaven. That could never happen. We go to heaven because Christ gives us the gift of heaven. It's God's grace that brings us there. However, the Lord, because he loves us, gives us the great privilege of participating in our own salvation and even of playing a part in the salvation of others. For us Christians, this is a great joy. Let's say that I commit a chronic sin of regularly grouching and snapping at my friend, my co-worker, or my spouse. The Lord is going to forgive me of that sin and only his grace can do that. But if I am strong enough, the Lord will allow me to work on that sin as I move forward through my everyday life. He will allow me be his yokemate so that together we can chip away at that sin until I come to a better place. And the joy that I feel accomplishing the work of becoming a better person is one of the greatest joys that a Christian can experience.

When I was a kid, my mom was generous about baking cookies for the family. She was even more generous because she allowed me to "help" her. I'll bet you already know why I put quotation marks on the word "help." We all know that she would have made the cookies faster and more efficiently and with a lot less mess had she done it all herself, without my "help." But she let me help because she loved me and she knew how much joy it would bring me. The same is true about the Lord's work of our salvation. Christ can save us without any help from us, but instead he gives us this great gift of working on our own salvation—of "helping" him in his work of saving us. He even calls us to help him with working out the salvation of others. And like the cookie-making, this makes his work of salvation a bit messier. Our own salvation is messier because we are involved with it, with our fingers in the bowl. But that's okay with Jesus. It is worth it for the joy and the growth that we experience in the process. It wasn't until recently when I prayed over this passage that for the first time in my life, I thanked the Lord for letting me work on my own salvation.

Amidst all of the gifts you've thanked Christ for, have you thanked him for the privilege and joy of being his yokemate as he works out your salvation and the salvation of the world?

Mark E. Thibodeaux, SJ