



July 9, 2023

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him."*

Matthew 11:27



Dear Friends,

Where do we begin to understand God? Christians begin with the experience of Jesus. As an observant Jew, Jesus professes faith in the One God of Israel. *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one."* (Deuteronomy 6:4) In the prayer life and ministry of Jesus reveals an intimate connection with God, whom he calls his Father.

In today's passage from Matthew, Jesus uses a familiar proverb to describe his relationship with God, *"No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son and anyone to whom the son wishes disclose him."* We would say *"Like father, like son."*

Part of Jesus's mission is to reveal to us what God is like. Today he tells us that God is a Mediterranean patron or "godfather." This is what is meant when Jesus says, *"Father, Lord of Heaven and earth."* This says that Jesus' Father is truly in charge of all creation and human existence. Jesus is God's representative, God's broker. He mediates between the patron and the clients.

In the Mediterranean world a patron is a person of means who freely chooses clients and then decides to treat those clients "as if" they were family. What is peculiar about this patron is he chooses as his favorites the powerless. These are the ones who are unable to obtain or do anything for themselves.

Jesus contrasts the powerless ones with the *"wise and learned."* These are more capable of taking care of themselves than God's clients are capable. In fact, if these *"wise ones"* took a cue from God they might be patrons of the *"little ones."* Like Jesus' parable of the greedy farmer with a bumper crop, they refuse to be patrons and hoard their surplus for themselves. Jesus' critique certainly aimed the religious and political establishment.

A yoke is a wood and leather harness used to control oxen while plowing a field. Jesus uses the yoke as a metaphor for all the things that control the lives of people. Most of Jesus' listeners had a heavy yoke. They were tenant farmers whose lives were controlled by the wills and whims of the landowners. They lived from day to day. And the religious leaders grew fat on the Temple tithes collected from the people, rather than redistributing it to the needy. The Pharisees also laid the yoke of 613 commandments on their followers who sought advice on how to please God. They were told, following the Law was *"bearing the yoke of God."*

The yoke that Jesus teaches is a way of life very different from that taught by other leaders in Judea. The yoke Jesus preaches is an easy and light burden. That would be very appealing to his peasant listeners. What Jesus is urging is taking on the ties of relationship, that is love. Love and charity are the yoke we are called to carry.

We like Jesus are called to be brokers for the Kingdom of God. **1.** That means we are children of God called to reveal God's compassion and mercy. **2.** We are called to lift the burdens that control people's lives. We must realize that a large part of what burdens and controls people is not the fault of individuals. **3.** Much of what controls people is systemic. The political, economic, and religious systems burden people with racism, classism, poverty, ignorance, and xenophobia. We must challenge systemic oppression. As brokers for the Kingdom, we lift the burdens of people with the power of Divine Love!

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

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