

My Yoke is Easy and My Burden Light

a sermon preached on the

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at

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Lection: Zechariah 9: 9-12 ; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

This morning's Gospel reading is a four-fold message.

Firstly, Jesus was saddened by the perversity of human nature. To Him, men and women seemed to be like children playing in the village square. One group said to the other, "Come on and let's play at weddings", and the others said, "We don't feel like being happy today". Then the first group said, "All right, come and play at funerals," and the others said, "We don't feel like being sad today". How contrary can you get? No matter what was offered, they found fault with it.

The fact is that when people don't want to listen to the truth, they will easily find an excuse to turn a deaf ear. Grown men and women can be very like spoiled children who refuse to play, no matter what the game is. They criticised John because he was a loner, without giving consideration to the fact that John's message had moved many men and women towards God as they had not been moved for centuries. Then they criticised Jesus for mixing too much with ordinary people. In Jesus, people were finding a new way of life, and a new access to God.

It is this contrary attitude of disagreement, and refusing to listen and negotiate with those of a different opinion and life-style, that is the cause of war, conflict and economic downturn throughout the world today. It is a cancer which makes its way down to our personal lives, even to the core of family life, resulting in physical, mental and sexual abuse, murder, and mistreatment of innocent children. It is time to stop talking 'at' each other. It is time to listen 'to' each other. It is time to talk 'with' each other, in the assurance of God's love which Jesus portrays in the second message of today's Gospel.

Some see God as distant and remote. Others see God as a judge or as head of some secret service agency ready to pounce and punish. However, Jesus portrays God as loving, compassionate and forgiving – a God who is passionately interested in us, a God whose concern is not to judge and condemn, but to guide us in the way of justice, peace and love.

Jesus said, "I bless you Father for hiding these things from the wise and intelligent". These words are often misinterpreted. Jesus is not condemning intellectual power, but intellectual pride. It is not cleverness that shuts God out. It is pride. It is not stupidity that enables God to come in. It is humility. When faith is a matter of the head alone, it becomes a cold, intellectual thing. The result then is that God remains outside us, a distant and aloof figure. But faith is not just a matter of the head. It is more a matter of the heart. When faith is rooted in the heart, God is seen as close and loving.

To know God this way is like a spring within us, from which we can drink and refresh ourselves.

Thirdly, Jesus said – "I am gentle and humble of heart". Humility and gentleness don't seem to make much sense in the world today.

Take gentleness. There is a belief that if you want to get on in life you have to be hard, because if you are gentle people will walk all over you. Gentleness tends to be equated with weakness. Gentleness is not a form of weakness. It is a form of strength. It was Henri Nouwen who said “A gentle person treads lightly, looks tenderly and touches with reverence.”

There was no harshness in Jesus. He didn't force himself on people – He respected their freedom. The people with the greatest influence over others have no need to control – they influence.

Like gentleness, humility is a form of strength. Humility is the foundation on which to build our spirit. Humility is grateful recognition of our goodness, as long as we acknowledge that this goodness is a gift from God.

Fourthly, Jesus said, “Come to me all who labour and I will give you rest.”

Life can be very burdensome. There are all kinds of burdens – worry, responsibility, disappointments, hurts, bitterness, guilt, unemployment, the break-up of a relationship, addiction – to name but a few. Those who do menial jobs are poorly paid and generally taken for granted. They are not valued as people. They are only noticed when they are missing. A little sensitivity, or a word of appreciation, would help to make a burden light. It makes a world of difference when people are recognised and treated with kindness and respect.

Jesus lived among the ordinary people. He knew at first hand the struggles, difficulties and frustrations the people had to endure. He was aware of the heavy burdens life placed on their shoulders. But Jesus said, “My yoke is easy, my burden is light”. Jesus carried His burden with love. Only love can make a heavy burden seem light. If Jesus placed any burden on us at all, it was that of loving one another, but if we “have love”, that is no burden at all. He doesn't take our burdens from us. He gives us the strength to carry them.

While faith makes all things possible, Love makes all things easy. There is a story I like very much, one of a little boy from a Scottish village who was carrying a younger boy on his shoulders. A man said to him, “that's quite a burden you have there laddie”. The boy replied, “That's not a burden, it's my wee brother.”

Amen.

References: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
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