

Homily for 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time  
July 5<sup>th</sup> 2020

**The Well Fitting Yoke**

There is a legend concerning the quiet years of Jesus, the years prior to his visible ministry. The legend claims that Jesus the carpenter was one of the master yoke-makers in the Nazareth area. People came from miles around for a yoke, hand carved and crafted by Jesus son of Joseph.

When customers arrived with their team of oxen Jesus would spend considerable time measuring the team, their height, the width, the space between them, and the size of their shoulders. Within a week, the team would be brought back and he would carefully place the newly made yoke over the shoulders, watching for rough places, smoothing out the edges and fitting them perfectly to this particular team of oxen.

That's the yoke Jesus invites us to take. Do not be misled by the word "easy," for its root word in Greek speaks directly of the tailor-made yokes: they were "well-fitting." The word can also be translated as: "kind, good and benevolent". This is why we have joined to this gospel a passage from the Old Testament that speaks of the lowly benevolent king, coming not on a war horse, but on a donkey in the attitude of humility. This Zechariah text, used on Palm Sunday, celebrates what the psalm says, when poetically it declares:

The LORD is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in mercy.  
<sup>9</sup>The LORD is **good to all**,  
and his compassion is over all that he has made. <sup>1</sup>

This phrase "good to all" is the same Greek word translated in the Gospel as "easy". So this easy yoke Jesus invites us to take up is kind, benevolent and good and it speaks of the compassion of Jesus. Therefore it fits us well, does not rub us nor cause us to develop sore spirits and is designed for two, you and your yoke-partner Jesus.

Running throughout all scripture from the beginning to the end is the theme that ours is a burden bearing Christ. He is not just a Lord whom we burden, and we do, but a Lord who actually solicits our burdens so that in being joined to Jesus we can discover the well-fitting yoke of him who invites us to find rest for our souls.

So the question we want to ponder is, how do we join our souls to the life of Jesus and find that rest of which he speaks?

The answer is found in verse 29, where Jesus says to us:

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible\*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ps 145:8–9). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

***Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart,<sup>2</sup>***

In this verse Jesus invites us to imitate him in two key ways. First, in gentleness or meekness, second, in humility. So the yoke of Jesus is gentle, and is a yoke that can only be joined to those who are learning the way of humility.

So let's think about this humility.

Do to so, it is helpful to know that by referring to the yoke, Jesus is alluding to the Old Testament Book of Sirach chapter 51, verses 26-27. Here we read of Wisdom speaking; and Wisdom says this:

***Put your neck under the yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by.***

***See with your eyes that I have labored little and found myself much rest.***

Notice the two images: Taking the yoke of Wisdom upon you will actually give you rest, if you learn to live according to Wisdom. So what is Jesus doing here? He is saying "I am wisdom in person and I am calling you to imitate me in my humility and in my gentleness, and if you do that, you are actually going to find peace, you are actually going to find rest; not for your bodies, but for your souls.

Now listen again to these two verses. From Sirach:

***Put your neck under the yoke, and let your souls receive instruction***

From Matthew:

***Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me***

Here is the lesson about humility, we are invited to have a docile and teachable spirit. Let me illustrate this from the Rite of Baptism. Prior to an infant being baptized the child is anointed with the oil of the catechumens on the breastbone, that place close to the heart. Catechumen means "one being instructed". As the little one is anointed the minister says:

***We anoint you with the oil of salvation  
in the name of Christ our Savior;  
may he strengthen you with his power,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.***

Notice this is called the "oil of salvation". Therefore we see a close association between words of instruction and the way of salvation. Indeed it is as we receive this instruction from the Lord that we can be strengthened with his power to take his humble yoke upon us.

Indeed we see another association between our text and baptism when Jesus says:

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Mt 11:29). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

***I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.<sup>3</sup>***

The wise and understanding of this world, that is, those who rely on their own judgment, cannot accept the revelation which Christ has brought us. Supernatural outlook is always connected with humility. A humble person, who gives himself little importance, sees; a person who is full of self-esteem fails to perceive supernatural things.

This is always the way of wisdom, as it says repeatedly in the Old Testament, begins with the fear of the Lord.” This means a life joined in humility to Jesus allows us to walk in the way of wisdom.

Now we all know that to live in this world is to be weighed down by worry, anxiety and fear. I find it so comforting that the Lord knows this about us. Therefore he is gentle in his care and treatment of us. This in turn is to influence the way we live with others. Knowing the tenderness of Jesus in our own lives, inspires us to treat others with that same gentle tenderness.

Again notice how in our first reading the tools of violence, war and supremacy of one people over another gives way to the benevolent kingdom of Jesus. As we more fully realize WHO Jesus is, as the one who is united with the Father, a deepening conversion happens in our souls. We see how, for instance, this changed Saul of Tarsus, from a man of aggressive violence into the Apostle who in today’s reading from Romans teaches us what it means to carry the yoke of Jesus.

***If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you. <sup>4</sup>***

What is the life we will receive? A deepening love for Jesus and his way of gentle humility. As we live with this supernatural perspective we will see that the ways of this world do weigh us down with such worry and anxiety as the experience we have had with these months of COVID has shown us. It is into this very really worry that Jesus invites us to deepening trust in him, to allow for his well-fitting yoke gives rest to our souls so that with the conclusion of today’s Psalm we sing:

***Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.  
The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.  
<sup>14</sup> The LORD upholds all who are falling,***

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Mt 11:25–26). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible\*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ro 8:11). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

*and raises up all who are bowed down.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ps 145:13–14). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.





















































































































































