

Homily for July 19, 2018

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the country people came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been: 'My yokes fit well.'

It may be that in today's Gospel Jesus is using a picture from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years.

Jesus says: 'My yoke fits well.' What he means is: 'The life I give you is not a burden to cause you pain; your task is made to measure to fit you.' Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.

But for this to happen we have to also realize what was expressed poetically in our Isaiah text:

*Like a woman with child,
who writhes and cries out in her pangs
when she is near her time,
so were we because of you, O LORD;
¹⁸ we were with child, we writhed,
but we gave birth only to wind.¹*

What a vivid image. All those months of gestation and the pains of labour, to what end. To give birth to nothing. Here is the thing about life. We cannot avoid that life involves labour. Moses captures this when he said famously in Psalm 90:

*The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span is only toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.²*

Psalm 49 has this sobering refrain:

*Mortals cannot abide in their pomp;
they are like the animals that perish.³*

Labour without being joined to Jesus is incredibly burdensome. But when we learn to respond to Jesus' invitation to take on his well-fitting yoke we understand what Blessed Pope Paul VI meant when he said in a Corpus Christi homily from June 13, 1974:

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 26:17–18). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ps 90:10). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ps 49:20). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

“Jesus says now and always, ‘come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ His attitude towards us is one of invitation, knowledge and compassion; indeed, it is one of offering, promise, friendship, goodness, remedy of our ailments; he is our comforter; indeed, our nourishment, our bread, giving us energy and life”⁴

Such is the invitation that is ours whenever we approach the carpenter of our souls in the Eucharist. So important is it for us to share our burden with Jesus that St. Augustine wrote:

“Any other burden oppresses and crushes you, but Christ’s actually takes weight off you. Any other burden weighs down, but Christ’s gives you wings. If you take a bird’s wings away, you might seem to be taking weight off it, but the more weight you take off, the more you tie it down to the earth. There it is on the ground, and you wanted to relieve it of a weight; give it back the weight of its wings and you will see how it flies” (St Augustine, Sermons, 126).

What kind of flight do those who share in the Lord’s burden know? Listen again to another excerpt from Isaiah:

***The way of the righteous is level;
O Just One, you make smooth the path of the righteous.
8 In the path of your judgments,
O LORD, we wait for you;
your name and your renown
are the soul’s desire.
9 My soul yearns for you in the night,
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
For when your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.⁵***

Here is language that soars, language calling us to celebrate that to learn righteousness is to live lives ordered to Jesus so that even in the midst of challenges and hardships we can know the rest he offers. When we discover this we learn one of life’s most important lessons, captured in the middle of our Isaiah passage:

***O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
for indeed, all that we have done, you have done for us.⁶***

⁴ [*Saint Matthew’s Gospel*](#). (2005). (p. 94). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 26:7–9). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Is 26:12). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

This is the heart of the Gospel. Peace can be ours when we stop striving and surrender to grace of Jesus and allow him to live in us and through us. Then we discover that Jesus' yoke is well fitting and it is light.