

Reflection for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart. Friday 19th June 2020

Good morning and welcome once again to the little chapel at my residence. The pandemic has hit our city in a serious way and we must do everything in our power to promote and protect life. I am alone here, having gotten used to setting up the cell phone in selfie mode so I do not need the face mask. But once I step outside the mask becomes essential as it serves to protect others. And that is what today's feast is all about – bringing comfort to others and making life bearable for them. This year the Gospel reading for the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus comes from the eleventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel. It is a familiar text and is used in anointing liturgies, at funerals and when dealing with persons in need of consolation.

I will use the second half of the passage for the reflection today. Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes my yoke is easy and my burden light".

Perhaps a little explanation of some of the words used by Jesus is necessary. Firstly the yoke was a farming implement used to span two oxen. This was necessary so as to enable the oxen to pull the plough in the same direction. Imagine what a disaster it would be if there was no yoke and each ox went in a different direction. Now when Jesus invites us to shoulder his yoke what he means is that he is not in front of us or behind us, but alongside us – pulling the same load. What a beautiful thought that Jesus is right next to us carrying the same burdens that we have to carry. This is a fruit of the incarnation. When the word became flesh (Jn 1:14) God entered fully into the human condition. Yokes in those days were made by carpenters. They were made of wood and were made to fit. That is what the word "easy" means in the original text. If the yoke was too tight it would hurt the animal and if it was too loose it would cause bruising. Either way one would get very little ploughing done but if the yoke was shaped right it worked well. So, when a carpenter says that his yoke is easy, he knows exactly what it means.

He also says that he is gentle and humble in heart. In the OT this was a metaphor for the man who was just, poor, and on the side of those who were crushed with suffering. The word gentle is used three times in Matthew's Gospel and it is important that we understand it. Nowadays, gentleness is equated with weakness. We have not yet learnt to salute the soldier whose strength is not to fight. In the original text, the word for gentle means two things. Firstly it means to tame what is wild within me. When I realise that we do not live by instinct alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God then I am gentle. The word also means to be strong enough to carry another's burden. Jesus says that he is strong enough to carry our burdens. The ultimate carrying of our burdens happened on Calvary.

And so for the feast of the Sacred Heart in Cycle A, the Church reflects on that aspect of God's fatherly heart which takes care of us when the burdens of life become too heavy. The invitation is there – we simply have to take Jesus at his word.

Let us pray: Lord, during this time we carry many burdens. The Coronavirus pandemic has hurt the human community in many ways. There is uncertainty, fear, illness and economic hardship. The body of Christ, is affected, infected and inflicted but we know that where the body is the head is also there. Today his word tells us that he pulls our load with us. Thank you for the gift of so great a redeemer. Help us to realise that no matter how heavy the burden, he is right there with us. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

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