

36 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A July 9, 2017
Zechariah 9:9-10 Psalm 145 Romans 8:9,11-13 Matthew 11:25-30

The primary focus of the Gospels these last two Sundays has been about carrying our heavy crosses of burden in life. Jesus says, "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me." At times, the temptation is to find a way to make the cross lighter that we're bearing. However, today's Gospel message is one of *hope* that Jesus will help us carry our cross, if we only but ask for His help.

A story is told about a group of devout people who were each carrying a heavy cross of burden on their pilgrimage. The going was rough and there was much moaning and groaning among the travelers. It was such rough going that one of the pilgrims found his cross just too heavy to carry, so he decided to cut off a part of it and make it shorter so it would be lighter to carry.

After days of walking, the pilgrims approached the Promised Land of everlasting joy and peace in God's presence. But they still had one obstacle to overcome. Between them and heaven was a river. How could they get to the other side?

Someone thought of the idea of each traveler using his cross to make a bridge. And wouldn't you know it? The crosses were just the right length to span the river.

So, all the cross-bearers were able to cross the river *except* for the one who had decided to cut down his cross to make it lighter.

Today's Gospel contains one of the most encouraging invitations Jesus ever issued, and at the same time it is an invitation that is too often overlooked by His followers of today, as it was overlooked by the pilgrim who shortened his cross. "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." *What an offer!* Artists and sculptors who have portrayed our Saviour above our altars with arms outstretched before us have captured that invitation most vividly.

Then Jesus completes the invitation by saying, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon ourselves and to learn from Him. A yoke is a double harness made of wood that is custom-made and placed on the necks of a pair of oxen to enable them to pull a plow or wagon together.

When Jesus says we should take His yoke upon us and learn from Him, He is offering to share our cross with us the way animals support one another by pulling together. With Jesus helping us, our cross becomes lighter.

Rejected by His own people, Jesus extends this great invitation to all persons of every nation, race, and generations. He wants all people to come to Him and learn from Him how to live. He wants to give a vision that will enable us to love heaven and set our sights on it, like pilgrims on a journey.

In the time of Jesus, He witnessed and felt the pain of His people stagger under their burdens. There are many people who are sick, blind, lame, poor and rejected. The Pharisees laid heavy burdens on people's backs, but did not lift a finger to help. These people were staggering under the heavy yoke and burden of keeping the 613 laws that they had to live perfectly. As well, the Romans who occupied Israel oppressed the people with heavy taxes and unfair laws.

Jesus feels our pain also as we struggle with our daily burdens of life. Many of us are carrying heavy crosses that often weary us. Life can seem burdensome and oppressive and unfair. Sometimes we cry out to our Lord, "Why me? What have I done to deserve this cross?" Sometimes choices we have made, or steps we take that lead us away from God, cause us to feel that our cross is just too heavy to carry.

At other times, we are faced with illnesses and troubles, broken marriages, difficult family and friend relationships, disappointments, hurts, addictions, unemployment, our children not going to Church, worry and responsibility which we did not bring on ourselves. What about the person people are gossiping about? What about the person who is told she or he has cancer? Whatever the case, often we wish we could shorten our cross so that it would be lighter for us to carry.

Many people come to Mass on Sunday laden down with the problems, troubles and burdens of life. Jesus meets us at the door and embraces us and all our trials. Jesus does not offer to remove our trials but He offers to lighten them by walking by our side and helping us to carry them.

In the Mass we hear within our hearts the invitation of Jesus: "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you." As we lay down our

difficulties and sufferings on the altar, Jesus makes them into an acceptable offering to His Heavenly Father.

Here at Mass we pray for those of us who are heavily burdened and finding life difficult and painful. Here at Mass is also where our soul grows spiritually stronger for the journey of life we all have to make. It's a journey that is never easy but a journey for which Christ Himself helps us to become stronger.

During each Mass we come up in procession toward the priest who, in the person of Jesus, offers to us the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of Jesus, our spiritual food and drink, our divine refreshment. We give thanks for receiving Jesus because He is gentle and humble of heart. In Him our souls find rest, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Of course, understanding today's Gospel does not make it easy for us to carry our burdens. Still, there are small steps we can take as we strive to respond to Jesus' invitation. How much effort even these little steps require! All we have to do is to keep trying, knowing in our hearts that Jesus is helping us to carry our daily burdens. Jesus wants us to trust and love Him with our whole heart and soul.

Let us look into our hearts today and see how willingly we submit to the yoke of Jesus. Let us humble ourselves so we can feel the tug of Jesus leading us where He needs us to go. Let us rejoice that He loves us so much that He is willing to join Himself with each of us and give us His personal guidance.

Today's Gospel speaks to us of the tender personal and human qualities of Christ's love for us. For those of us who are weary and burdened, Jesus gives us this Good News of *hope* in today's Gospel. The challenge is not to shorten our cross but to be united with Christ in carrying our cross. Then at the end of our pilgrim journey on earth, our cross will have been the right length to cross into heaven where we will find complete peace and rest for our souls.