

"Jesus Give Us Rest from Our Sin" - St. Matthew 11:25-30

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day. Amen

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Contrary to what many may think, God is not a hard task master. He wants us to rest from time to time. In fact, when God created the world, and everything in it, He made provisions for us to rest. God created the world in six days and as an example to us, He took the seventh day off to rest. God desired right in the divine design of things that we have at least one day off per week and that we dedicate it to Him who gave it to us so that we are refreshed both physically and spiritually.

Because of the sin of our first parents the good clean work that was done in the Garden of Eden is now onerous labour. Often work is not the fun thing that it was intended to be. When God created the world, work was a joy. It was always fulfilling. Adam and Eve could go to sleep at the end of the day knowing that their work was pleasing in God's sight. That all changed when Adam and Eve sinned. Work became a burden. Today, even those who really enjoy their work have days of frustration. For most people, work is a necessary evil that puts food on the table, clothes on the back, and a roof over the head. It is something to avoid if possible.

The real burden, though, is something much worse than the frustration of an unfulfilling job. It is the knowledge that no matter what we do, it is never good enough. It is the knowledge that we have so many sins that we do not even know about most of them. It is the terror of the eternal punishment that sin deserves. It is the terrible realization that no amount of labor on our part can free us from the burden of this punishment.

Jesus said: "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

"James Botts once relayed this story about a farmer plowing his field with a team of Oxen. The man noticed that one of the animals was seemingly a little bigger than the other so he asked him about it. The response from the farmer was very interesting. He said that the big animal was an older animal that was well trained and the smaller one was a young animal that was new to the yoke. The man went on to inquire as to why he put them together and this is the answer that He got, "Well you see, it's like this. That older ox is the best ox that I have ever had; he knows his way around the field. The reason I put the younger one with him is so that the older, more knowledgeable ox could

teach him how to plow. If I never put them together the younger one would never learn. By himself the younger ox would pull himself to death, but together he learns to cooperate with and rest in the strength of the older ox.” (James Botts, “Rest for the Stressed”, (www.sermoncentral.com))

When Jesus talks about carrying our burdens and giving us rest. He uses the idea of a yoke to accomplish this. Back in my country as an agronomist I had the chance to see how the farmers plowed the field with oxen and as well with horses. Other farmers used tractors and used them to do the heavy work. Using animals to work seems like a difficult life to me. When I think of a yoke, I think of hard, manual labor. But instead of work, Jesus refers to a yoke as providing relief. How can such a difficult farming tool be used to reduce the weight of the burdens we bear today?

Jesus loved to use the ordinary things in the world to explain more difficult concepts. It was common for Him to use symbols from agriculture to explain His ministry. Today is no different. Using the example of a common yoke, he has a message for us today. He wants us to take His yoke and submit to His lead. He will bear the weight of our burdens. Jesus invites those who suffer under the burden of their sin to come to Him for rest. Only Jesus can relieve us of our burdens and give us rest from our sin and guilt. For Jesus is the only one who is worthy enough to take our burden of sin from us. Only Jesus walked this earth in perfection.

Therefore, only Jesus can lift the labor and burden of our sins from us and place them onto Himself. He is the only one who could carry our burden with His labor of suffering and death on the cross. He carried our sin burden to the grave even as He was buried. And He left our sin burden buried forever with His resurrection from the dead. This is the God who Jesus reveals to us - the God who wishes to relieve us of our burden of sin and replace it with His rest.

Jesus brought salvation, and He gives rest for, He is the only One with the authority to do so. He is the only One with the power to take us back to paradise. He is the One who suffered and died on the cross so that our sins are forgiven. He is the One who patched up our relationship with God because He Himself is God, God in the flesh, God made man.

Jesus Christ did choose to reveal the Father. He chose to reveal the Father in His Church. And the Church is where ever the Gospel is preached in all its purity and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. This is the Church of God, right here is the Church of God because the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed and the sacraments are administered to you, the people of God. He has chosen to forgive you of your sins, to bring you into His family, to let your ears hear of His love for you, to give you rest in His arms in this life and in the next. Jesus gave us the ears to hear as He calls out in His beautiful gracious loving voice for

us to hear in this place this morning; "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Many of you who are looking for rest may wonder, where is this rest in my life? Jesus answered saying; "you will find rest for your souls." That "rest" is our Christian hope. Without it we have nothing but foolish delusions. We can rest now because we are no longer labouring to please an angry God. We could lay this right on top of St. Paul's words in the 7th chapter of Romans where we struggle with our sins, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."

Have you ever found yourself willing one thing in the church but doing another in the world? Have you ever wanted to tell of God's love to your neighbor but then talked about the weather instead? Although Jesus has rescued us from the sin that lies in us by nature, there are times when we find ourselves acting like we are still part of the fallen world. Jesus says, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

Friends, we are weary and heavy laden. We are burdened with our sin, and in our poor miserable wretchedness we cry out, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" And we know the answer, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord," says our text. We reach across the page to hold on to those words of great promise thanking our Saviour Jesus and praying, "Create in me a clean heart, O God ... and restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." There it is, the essence of the Christian faith. We need not struggle to climb to reach God, He came to us. "Rejoice greatly! ... Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation," says our first reading. Jesus will put His yoke on us, He will give us His kind of work to do, and He will give us Gospel commands.

Even though His yoke is light, there are commands to be obeyed for our own benefit. Jesus commands us to receive the forgiveness of sins that He offers. He commands us to be brought to the waters of holy Baptism. He commands us to hear the Word of forgiveness and the promise that there is a peaceful rest waiting for us. We are to hear again and again the Good News that Jesus loves us and poured out His precious blood to purchase us and wash away our sins. The Supper that our Lord gave to His Church for all time is not an option but He says "do this", demanding that we eat the body and drink the blood that was given and shed for the forgiveness of all our sins.

Holy Communion is not an option but it physically displays our relationship with God. It shows us that we are no longer separated from God, God is with us once again, for we commune with Him and His chosen people in His Church. Jesus commands us to trust that He has forgiven

all our sins, to trust that we are no longer separated from an angry God but that He loves us and has come to us. He demands that we trust in His promise of a never ending "rest" in heaven.

Finally Jesus demands that we go to be with Him forever, and once and for all, rest there from our labours and sorrows. He demands that we sit down with Him at the banquet, and feast with Him for ages upon ages. He commands us to receive blessing upon blessing, not because we have earned it, but because He loves us and wants to give it to us, for He is the righteous One, the King who has come to us bringing salvation.

So you come to Him. As you have come today, come often to His Gospel. Receive His rest, as He gives it now. He gives free remission of all your burdens. He promises eternal rest through His death. Do not come as the wise and the strong, as if your coming demonstrates how good you are. No, come as the lowly and the foolish, the weak and the weary. His rest is for you, whenever His Gospel is given. Receive it, and be refreshed. Amen

In the Name of your Savior, who became gentle and lowly for you. Amen.