

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: July 9, 2017

By: *Rev. John Rogers Vien*
2016 Aquinas Institute of Theology Great Preacher Honoree

“COME TO ME ALL YOU WHO ARE BURDENED ... ”

What is the heaviest burden that you have ever carried? Think about it, what is the heaviest burden that you have ever carried?

I bet that most everyone here, on hearing and reflecting on that question, didn't think of the couch that you helped your brother move or the bags of groceries that you've lugged into your house. No, our heaviest burdens aren't measured in pounds; they're usually measured in the emotional and spiritual toll that weighs on us and wears us down, breaking our backs and breaking our spirits.

So, what are your burdens? For some, the burden is loss and grief at the death of a loved one. For others, it is a marriage that has broken down or a love that was lost. For others still, the burden is ill health, chronic pain, fatigue, weight, endless paperwork or bureaucracy. For still others, the burden is not having a job, fear of losing your home or not having enough savings for the future. Sometimes it is worry for a family member, a parent who needs more help than you can give or a child who has lost their way. For some, the burden is the memory of abuse, the pain of feeling unforgiven or the knowledge that you have made a mess of things and you have no easy way out. Yes, these are our burdens, yours and mine. Those things are much tougher to carry than an overpacked suitcase!

None of us goes looking for these burdens that weigh us down and break our spirits. No, they find us; such is the life we lead in this valley of tears. No one escapes the burdens of life.

But those kinds of burdens are not what God desires for us, I believe. No, it is God's desire that we have life and have it to the full; after all, Jesus said, “I came that you might have life, and have it in abundance!” (*John 10:10*) These burdens that we bear are the result of imperfection, they are the consequences of sin, they are the stuff of life.

And though we often pray that God would remove our burdens, that's not what Jesus promises in our Gospel today. What Jesus promises is to always remain present with us. Our burdens are not eased because the problems go away; the burdens become light because Jesus is always with us, helping us to carry them.

“Come to me...” Jesus says, “all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

These are some of those most beautiful and comforting words in the Bible! But they might not mean much if you don't know what a yoke is. Unless you grew up on a farm or studied Scripture, you might not know! A yoke is a wooden frame, with a bar and a collar-like piece on the ends, which is attached to the necks of two animals, usually oxen. By binding the two oxen together, the yoke makes them stronger. Two oxen working together to pull a plow or a till are much stronger than one ox working alone.

When Jesus says, *“Take my yoke upon you”*, it might at first seem like Jesus is giving us another burden. But actually, he is offering to help us carry the ones that we have! He is offering to share our burdens. He is offering to attach himself to us, and inviting us to attach ourselves to him. And if we have Jesus helping us to carry the burdens of our life, there is nothing that we cannot handle. There is no burden so great that it cannot be eased by the grace and presence and help of Jesus.

But too often, friends, we want to go at it alone, you and me; we don't want to ask for help from God or from anybody. We who are Americans are especially taught to be independent, to pull ourselves up from our bootstraps, to be self-made individuals, not to rely on anyone. But really, we who are Christians were never meant to be so independent! If we're honest, if we are meek and humble of heart, we must admit that we depend on God and depend on others for most everything in life. Today and always, Jesus invites us more and more to depend on him, to trust in him, to lay our burdens on him. Jesus is a gift, given to us out of love, a gift from the Father who never wants us to be alone in life, especially in our sufferings and pain.

Today, take Jesus up on his offer. Turn to him in prayer and allow him to carry you. This week, find Jesus' presence in the gift of a helping hand, a good listener, an easy day, an unexpected bonus, a moment of peace and quiet.



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Jesus comes to us as one who knows what it means to carry the burdens of daily living. And how blessed we are that Jesus still wants to be with us and assist us! So be mindful! For we encounter Jesus in family members, friends, doctors and nurses, in anyone who understands the burden we are carrying and reaches out to us to help. We encounter Jesus in the new insights we receive when we take time to be silent and to let Jesus comfort our hearts. We encounter Jesus in the meekness and humility that allow us to let go of our tendency to rugged individualism. And we encounter Jesus, here and now, in this Eucharist, his healing and loving and abiding presence.

Burdened we are, yes. But alone, no, never!