

Gospel: Mt 11:25-30

*Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

*'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.'*

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I suppose everyone at one time or another, and for many people, most of the time: we *are* carrying burdens. They might be physical burdens, of too much work, of sickness, of physical pain. Or they might be burdens of the soul. Cares and anxieties. At this moment in particular, all our anxieties about the pandemic, and the hardships it's created. But *all* sorts of anxieties: regrets about the past, fears for the future. We're searching for inner peace, and we don't find it.

So when we *are* labouring and overburdened as Jesus says in our gospel, I think it's a refreshment to our spirit even to hear those words of his: 'Come to me...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.'

So it's beautiful to even hear the words; to feel and to know as we hear them that Jesus knows us and understands us – every part of us, everything we're going through. But to gain the *full* peace that Jesus offers us, I think it helps to reflect more deeply, on just what it is that he offers, and how we're best going to receive it.

So first of all, what do we have to do? The *first* thing he says, is 'Come to me'. So: 'Come into my presence, speak to me in prayer. I'm always there, waiting. Don't delay.'

That means, in the course of our daily labours, in the midst of our anxieties, it's so important just to lift a thought to him, to receive his strength, to receive his blessing, to know that he's by our side, sharing every struggle. Don't wait until the end of the day; or the time we've scheduled, when hopefully we set aside some time specifically for prayer. So: that constant awareness of the presence of God.

But then, the importance of setting aside time *specifically* for prayer each day. How much time? Well, the more generous we are, then the more God can pour out his blessings, and give us peace of heart. So at least make your prayer time enough time to be noticeable in the day.

It's in that prayer time that the Lord can give us light in any darkness. When we're confused about something, or trying to make a difficult decision, he gives us the light of the Holy Spirit. When we're regretting the past, he reminds us of the peace of his forgiveness, and gives us the comfort that he always draws good even out of bad things that have happened. When we're anxious about the future, we hear his promise that he's always going to be with us. Remember the words of St John Vianney: 'When we pray properly, sorrows disappear like snow before the sun'.

So: that's the first step – Come to me, and I will give you rest. Being led by God's grace into the presence of Christ in prayer. To be with him, to listen to him. If we don't have peace of soul, maybe the remedy is something as simple as that. It's something we all know we *should* be doing, but how often we put it off because we think we don't have time.

It's really lack of trust, I suppose. We think we're going to put aside this time with God, and he's not going to give us anything in return. Or at least, he won't give us back as much as we're going to be giving up. When you think about it, it's a ridiculous idea. As though the God who knows everything, and who loves us infinitely, might actually not be listening! Might actually decide to be very skimpy with the blessings he gives us for the effort we make!

We've forgotten how to have that simple trust. And this idea takes us deeper into the meaning of our gospel. Jesus speaks of children with their trusting hearts. 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.'

Naturally in some ways, we're not meant to remain at the level of children. We're meant to grow up, and learn at an adult level, and take responsibilities – obviously. But in the presence of our heavenly Father, we have to have that total trust of little children.

How much trouble people create for themselves when they start to doubt the things that Jesus has taught us, when they think they have to weigh them all up for themselves, rather than simply accepting his word, because he is the truth. So: that simple trust of faith. How many burdens it takes away.

And then to trust God in all the ups and downs of life. To have that certainty that his love and his providence are truly guiding everything that happens. What peace of soul we find when we truly believe that nothing can happen that God isn't either *willing* to happen, or at least *allowing* to happen for a greater good. It doesn't take away the sufferings of life, but it does bring peace. To know that things are on the right track, in spite of the difficulties.

Maybe we've forgotten how to trust because we had a naïve idea that God would take away all the suffering, and that when he didn't, it meant he wasn't really looking out for us. So it does help our trust when we remember the mystery of the Cross. I think this is part of what it means when Jesus says in the Gospel, shoulder my yoke and learn from me. Take up whatever cross the day may bring, but realise that Jesus is carrying it alongside us. This is taking up his yoke. And this is what makes our burden light, because he takes the heavier part of the load.

So in our Mass today, when the power of his Cross is made present, we open our hearts; and put before him, without exception, every burden that weighs down our souls. We open our hearts in total trust, so that he can fill them with his presence, with the certainty of his love, with his peace that the world can never give. And we experience again the comfort of his words: 'You will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'