



Sermon Outlines



Our Gospel Reading from Matthew 11 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt 11:30)

At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.'

Introduction

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt 11:28)

- At the heart of today's Gospel reading is an invitation: to come to Jesus.
- Chapter Eleven of Matthew's Gospel begins, 'Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.' (11:1). As Jesus travels, what he finds upsets

him. We read 'then he began to upbraid the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.' (11:20). Immediately after this, he speaks the words of our Gospel reading today.

- As Jesus speaks with the Father, he reminds us that He is the answer to the question 'who is like God?'
- 'Who is like God?' Jesus is. And so is every human being made in the Divine image. That means you, and me, and every seafarer. Jesus tells us, too, that we might not find God revealed in the people or places we expect to find him, but in surprising faces and through unexpected graces.
- Today we encounter Jesus inviting us to participate in the Divine Life. We hear of Jesus speaking with the Father, illuminating the relationship of the Father to the Son, and the Son to the Father, and illuminating our relationship to Jesus. This is not simply a theological observation to reflect on. Instead, we hear Jesus inviting each one of us to participate in this Divine Life – to receive the gift of God's love in our life today, and find there true learning, rest and light.

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The Mission to Seafarers

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Take my yoke upon you. (Matt 11:29)

- The yoke is a wooden beam used in farming, placed around the shoulders of two large animals like oxen. They are drawn together by the yoke as they pull a plough through a field or carry a heavy load down a road. In this way, the weight is shared and the strength of those pulling is made one. The burden is taken up together.
- Jesus invites us to not just observe the relationship between Father and Son, but to take His yoke upon us.
- To understand this, it also helps to read this passage in light of the whole Gospel. As we come to Jesus, we are invited to share our burdens with him: our struggles, anxieties, fear, regrets or pain.
- However, in this relationship, unlike the yoke of the field, the burden is not shared equally. Even as we take his yoke upon us, Jesus takes upon Himself all that is ours on the cross. The God who is judge bears the weight of our sins, our betrayals and regrets, bearing them Himself on the cross. In this way, our weight, the burdens of our life, are completely lifted from our shoulders by the yoke of Jesus. He bears the weight of our burdens and sets us free.
- These verses are often read at the office of Night Prayer (or Compline) as a reminder to set down the cares of the day, but it offers an invitation to the whole of our days to walk with Jesus and learn from him.
- Sometimes, when reading Jesus' invitation, it is easy instead to be reminded of all the ways we don't have rest ourselves, and to feel our weariness in body, mind or soul. Jesus is not promising us a easy life free from difficulty or labour, but he is promising us a life which is different because it is shared with him and with one another. A life which is open to deeper forms of rest for our souls. A life where even our hunger to find rest can be transfigured when we open it up to God's grace.

How does this relate to seafarers?

- The life of a seafarer is transitory, on the move, and so often involves little rest. Life onboard a ship never stops, and times of rest are very often interrupted.
- Often the days are long, and seafarers are required to stand watch or be on duty through parts of the night (4 or 6 hours at a time). The daily rhythm is intense, and there are no days off at sea. The seafarers often take contracts at sea for 6 to 9 months, and are away from home this entire time, often quite literally on the other side of the world. Every day is busy and full of activity. Seafarers very often spend over 75% of their year at sea, away from loved ones and family.
- Very often seafarers describe this time away in terms of sacrificial love. They wish very much to be at home with those they love. They sail so that they can support their families, allow their children to receive an education, have medical coverage, and the stability of having a regular annual income. But the cost is high, as seafarers are prevented from being with those whom they love: with sick or dying parents or at bedside of their wife or partner as they give birth to a newborn baby, or missing birthdays and festivals. It is hard to find rest when you are constantly waking up in a new port, starting or finishing a contract, coming home for that precious time with loved ones, knowing that all too soon you will have to say goodbye.

Where do the Mission to Seafarers come in?

- The work of the Mission to Seafarers in many ways is to try and help bear the burdens (the yoke) of our fellow brothers and sisters who are on board ships. This can happen in conversation, in prayer, or in practical care (such as a SIM card to make it possible to stay in touch with loved ones).
- It is a ministry that involves glimpses of holy rest. That might come in sharing a cup of instant coffee or homemade chai tea, carving out a place for peace and rest, a holy place, in an environment that is often loud, hectic, and focused on greater output and more efficient productivity. It might come in sharing a woolly hat, a bar of chocolate, a meal, or a rosary.
- These encounters with seafarers are often fleeting. So many of the people we meet through the Mission to Seafarers we will never see again – contracts end, ships leave for ports and sail around the world and the activity of life is taken up again. So many of the encounters in the Gospels are fleeting too (like the woman Jesus meets at the well, or the centurion standing at the foot of the Cross). Yet even fleeting conversations can point towards less fleeting things: towards deeper rest and truer light.
- As a Chaplain, I thought I would be that witness, pointing towards that light, when I started visiting ships. Instead my experience, time and time again, is to see and encounter the Divine image in the faces of the seafarers I meet. Time and time again, they point me towards light.
- Because sometimes we can think that we are the ones giving gifts, or easing burdens, but this Gospel is a reminder that we all share together in this, held by Jesus. As we give and receive gifts of learning and rest and humility and gentleness (and cups of chai tea and woolly hats), we share in the gift of life that Jesus has given us through the Cross. As we care for one another, or share our burdens with each other, we draw closer to the life that Jesus is offering to us,.
- The opportunity to meet and speak with Seafarers (and, where appropriate, to pray) is nothing short of pure gift, a working out of the Divine economy of gift. It is a place to see our shared humanity and greet Jesus in the face of our brother or sister standing next to us. As we do this, may we all draw deeper into the Divine Life. May we come to Jesus and receive his gifts.