

Here we are, today, returning to Ordinary Time. That doesn't mean boring, stale or dull. The message and spirit of Easter is, hopefully, still alive in our hearts. The power and mystery of Lent, the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost are still just as real as they ever were. But the Church in her wisdom takes us out of the period of heightened awareness that we have been in, liturgically, since Ash Wednesday nearly 3 months ago. She does this because she knows, just as we do, that we live and act in a world that is both extraordinary and ordinary.

She also knows that we need to embrace the ordinary, the common of our everyday work and relationships. That includes the everyday relationship we have with God. The periods of celebration, such as Easter, serve to prepare us for the ordinary.

It is appropriate that our Gospel today touches on the, sometimes, all-to-real burdens that we bear. Parenting, marriage, work, school, losses, even faith can at times... be burdensome. The responsibilities of these can seem to be more than we might be able to handle.

Jesus offers us rest. But the rest comes with conditions..... that we take upon us His burden, His yoke.

And so we have to ask, what is His yoke? It is to become like Him. To be meek and mild, to be open and responsive to His promptings.

(PAUSE)

In considering this offer, it is prudent to look at it in the context in which Jesus offers it.

He had just been rejected, again, by the religious leaders of His time. These leaders were scrupulous in their following of Torah, of the Jewish Law. Everything they did was tied to Torah.

The "yoke" of Jewish law was considered a privilege enjoyed by devout Jews, for it revealed, then as well as today.... God's gift of wisdom for daily life.

Now Jesus takes on for himself the identity as God's wisdom and offers his yoke to those who would accept him.

People might be learned in religious rules, customs and teachings, but our primary source for understanding God's ways doesn't come from that knowledge. It comes from receiving Jesus and his message.

In fact, scrupulous observance of the law can make one blind to the freedom Jesus is offering us. Jesus claimed a fuller knowledge of God than can be attained by mere human pursuits—even with the most well-intentioned religious efforts.

He says, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father."

"All things" – the fullest revelation of God... is found in Jesus. He is ready to reveal "all things" about God to us.

In context, Jesus was speaking to the "little ones" the poor, illiterate and often oppressed. We, too, are the little ones, because when it comes to the fullness of understanding about God, we are all poor and illiterate by comparison to Christ.

(PAUSE)

In another place in scripture Jesus accused the Pharisees of putting heavy burdens on the poor, that is the "little ones" and not lifting a finger to lighten their load.

Today, there are those who claim, very sincerely, that some of the teachings of the Church are too burdensome, too difficult to live by in the everyday realities that we face.

The Church says that marriage is a union between "one man and one woman." It also teaches the permanent nature of that union. That seems a heavy burden, not to everyone, but certainly for many.

The Church says that life is to be protected and preserved from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. This of course,

sounds both logical and simple, unless you are a thirteen year old who finds herself pregnant.

And what about those who so desperately want children, but for one reason or another are unable to have them? Infertility is an incredible, even devastating burden. Yet the Church still says that certain methods of conceiving aren't morally acceptable.

What about those who are open to children, but not right now? What about those not open to children at all? The Church weighs in here, too.

So, how do we deal with these realities in our lives? Well, we could just ignore the Church, ignore our own consciences. We could do what we want and not what we know we should. Paul tells us today that that sort of living leads to death.

Jesus offers life, but not a life free of burdens. Rather He would put upon us HIS burden, we would share HIS yoke. And in taking on His yoke, we find rest.

Isn't it strange to think of rest as taking on a yoke? After all, a yoke is a tool for work. A yolk is for doing a task. For us who would call ourselves Christian, it is the task of serving Christ.

So, shall we accept the yoke Jesus is offering?

One thing we sense from Jesus is that his yoke is not meant to be oppressive; Paul says it will lead us to freedom.

When we accept Jesus' yoke we also receive Him as our full-time helper. He becomes our "yoke partner." This explains how Christians were and are able to accomplish enormously difficult and seemingly impossible tasks, even martyrdom. It explains how those today, though still burdened, can live within the boundaries of their well-informed consciences.

Jesus says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, but this may not **seem** entirely true. The burden Jesus alludes to are the demands of the laws of God and His Church.

But instead of preaching permissiveness, Jesus usually intensifies the demands. He takes them to a new level....

The yoke Jesus offers us is one he also wears.

Side by side we are to walk, watching and doing as Jesus does. Side by side we are to learn... by His grace... the way of gentle humility. Side by side we learn to blissfully rest in the providence of God.

For us, the "little ones," there will be no heavy religious burdens and obligations beyond our capacity to fulfill.... So long as we are yoked to Christ.

It is true that there are demands that can be burdensome that are given to us through the Church, but the Church also provides the means in which to carry those burdens. The Church is a manifestation of Jesus. It is His body on Earth. We are His body on Earth. Being yoked to Jesus is to be yoked to the Church. That truth is inescapable, though there are many who have tried.

It is in our being yoked to the Church, bearing it's teachings, with the help of the Body of Christ, of the Church that we are..... that we can and do find both our strength and our rest.

For it is only within the Church, that is Christ, that we find the fullness of truth.

It is only in the Church that we have the Eucharist. It is at our Eucharist that we admit our hunger for God and humbly pray, "I am completely dependent on your grace."

It is here that God sees our emptiness and fills it by feeding us the choicest food, the flesh and blood of the one who invites us today to, "Take His yoke upon us and learn from Him for He is meek and humble of heart."