

Homily for the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Tim

Inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty are these familiar words:

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

It's probably because it's the weekend of the Fourth that those words came to mind when I worked on today's gospel:

*Come to me all you who labor and are burdened
and I will give you rest... for my burden is light...*

There's a substantial resonance between the scripture and the poem but there's a significant difference between them as well.

Like Jesus, Lady Liberty invites everyone, and especially the burdened, to a refuge of rest and light.

That probably sounds great to all of us.

But the Lord's offer comes with a hook, and the hook may not be quite as inviting or welcome as the promised rest.

The hook is the *yoke*:

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...

A yoke is a wooden brace that fits around the neck of a farm animal so the farmer can direct its movement and keep in on the right track.

So how does that sound to you?

What kind of rest is promised here?

At what price comes this rest the Lord offers to the weary and the burdened?

Are we willing to be yoked so that we can find the rest?

Perhaps the best way to get at that question is to ask ourselves, each of us:

What yokes are already fitted around my neck?

What yokes already direct my movements and control my life?

What yokes are, in fact, the burdens from which I want to be freed?

Yokes come in all sizes, shapes and colors.

- For many, the most demanding yoke is a job, or two jobs, or a career path that more and more restricts my movement.
- Some of us are yoked by our own vision, dream, fantasy of happiness: and that yoke directs every step we take and choice we make.

- Some of us are yoked to our own or others' expectations of us: yoked to the demand to perform, to improve, to produce.
- Some of us are yoked to money, either the need for it or the desire to have more and more.
- And some of us are yoked to addictions, fears, grief, illness, anxieties, and bad habits that restrain our every move and narrow the path we walk. And those are just some of the yokes we already have around our necks.

Now, let's listen to Jesus' words again:

*Come to me, 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 light.

The yoke Jesus invites us to take upon ourselves, his yoke, is not a difficult one.

The hard part is slipping out of the yokes that control us and in which we put so much trust.

Will we trust that the Lord's yoke,
(the yoke of his Word, of his law, of his love, of his call to serve)
that his yoke will bring us the happiness we desire, the peace we want,
the rest we need and a lighter load to bear in this life?

All of us live our lives in one yoke or another -- or more than one.

Jesus invites us to slip out of those yokes
and feel the freedom of letting them go
and to bow, humbly, as he did for us on the Cross
and allow him to yoke us to himself.

We come to his table this Sabbath morning, this day of rest,
to lay down our burdens, if only for a while,
and to find here the rest he promised us.

Refreshed by his word and with the support of one another,
pray that we might even begin to slip out of the yokes that burden us
and invite the Lord to measure us for a yoke that will free us
and bring us his peace.

- Rev. Austin H. Fleming