

My Yoke is Easy and My Burden is Light  
07/9/17

Every so often we hear today's Gospel at a funeral. It's meant to provide comfort to the family of the deceased and remind them they are not alone in their sorrow and grief. They are not alone because Jesus will be with them whenever they call on Him. And sometimes that call comes to us, for we are to be Jesus to them. But we're not so familiar with the term yoke, unless we're talking about egg yolks. So the Gospel causes us to stop and think about the meaning behind Jesus' words.

Just like the story related by Deacon Dick Folger. He says there was once a famous New Yorker cartoon, where two men are standing before a large billboard that reads "STOP AND THINK." They stare at it for a while, and one of them finally says, "Kind of makes you want to stop and think."

Fr. Ralph Kuehner says that a yoke can be both a blessing and a burden and he uses the words engraved on the Statue of Liberty as an example. The poem etched into the base goes like this: "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."

Kuehner goes on to suggest that the words were chosen more than a century ago, and in some ways were imposed on our generation just as they were upon generations past and will be upon those that follow. We strive to live them as best we can and hope they continue to set a course for our life as a nation, sometimes as a blessing and sometimes as a burden.

Frederich Buechner tells us the words are not great poetry and that many a cynical word could be spoken about how the golden door turned out for many to be the door to a wretchedness greater than any they left behind on the teeming shores of their homelands. He goes on to suggest the words have power in them still, if we let them, to move us, to touch us close to where we live. Buechner also suggests the words have power because they are, in one way or another, words about us.

Whether we're rich or poor, whether our ancestors came to this country on the Mayflower or a New England slave ship or a 19<sup>th</sup> century clipper or in a jet, the huddled masses are part of who all of us are, both as individuals and as a people. They are our common past, but it goes farther and deeper than that.

In countless ways, both hidden and not so hidden, it is you and I who are the homeless and tempest-tossed, waiting on our own Ellis Islands for the great promise to be kept of a new world, a new life, which we haven't yet found, which no one has yet found.

Certainly we all are yearning for a peaceful, stress-free world. Yet where in the world can we find it? It seems that there is trouble where there used to be none. There is trouble in large cities and small cities. There is trouble in apartments and houses and everything in between. There is trouble in rural areas and in factories and in office buildings.

Who would have thought a mother could become so distressed and despairing that it would lead to her taking the lives of her husband and 4 of her children? Who would have thought someone would walk into an office building or factory or hospital and open fire on innocent people? If only these people had been willing to share the burden of their yoke, perhaps these lives would have been spared. The lyrics to the famous Burt Bacharach tune are haunting indeed: What the World needs now is love.

You see, a yoke is meant to focus the oxen's power and strength, to keep the oxen pulling in the same direction. It sets a course. And we've all heard the saying that a burden shared is half as burdensome.

Dominican Laurie Brink says that whether we think of the psychological forces that burden our souls or the forces of violence and conflict that afflict so many people in the world, we should look to Jesus as the One who can teach us the way to true peace. He invites us to learn from Him and take His yoke upon our shoulders, so that we might join in His mission of lifting the burdens of others.