

THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

The Fourteenth Sunday of the Year (Trinity 4)

In a Bible study on today's gospel passage a priest started off by asking the college student participants whether they really think that the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light. The answer he got was a resounding "No!" Asked to explain, the students went on to recount the daily pains and discomforts they suffer in their attempt to be faithful to Christ's teachings. "I have this problem," said Elena. "I pray about it constantly and I make all the effort I can, yet I keep falling into the same temptation over and over again." Johnson spoke about all his efforts to fight an addiction. "I have prayed about it. I have sought help. And I really try. Yet after a few days of apparent success, I find myself falling right back to where I started." Many of us can identify with the predicaments of these young people. In today's gospel Jesus offers us a way out: **"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest"** (Matthew 11:28). The rest he promises is a release from the experience of serving God as a fatigue and a burden. The promise means that serving God could be transformed into a sweet experience of rest.

Jesus then goes on to show how: **"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"**. Looks like we have a problem here! Is Jesus calling on those who are carrying heavy loads to come and add a yoke to their burden? Doesn't that sound like adding affliction to the afflicted? No; Jesus is asking us to cast away our burdens and take on his yoke. This is because, unlike the burdens we bear, his yoke is easy and his burden light.

Among the Jews the yoke was put on the necks of two cattle so that together they could pull the plough as one. It always takes a pair to work a yoke. When Jesus asks you to take the yoke, you might as well ask who is your yoke-mate. Your yoke-mate is none other than Jesus himself. The yoke, in fact, belongs to him and he only invites you to team up with him. The yoke of Christ is not just a yoke *from* Christ but also a yoke *with* him. To take the yoke of Christ is to associate and identify ourselves with him: our destiny with his destiny, our vision with his vision and our mission with his mission. It is to know that we are not pulling the yoke alone and by our power but together with Christ and by the strength that comes from him. It is to know that Jesus is not just a teacher who gives you homework but also a friend who helps you do it.

You are probably familiar with the story of a man who had a dream. In the dream he was walking along a sandy beach with Jesus and they were replaying all the important moments of his life. The man noticed that for each scene there were two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him and the other to Jesus. But he also noticed that when they came to the most difficult and trying moments of his life there were only one set of footprints to be seen. The man could not understand this, so he asked Jesus: "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. Why is it then that during the most difficult periods of my life when I needed you the most you would leave me?" Jesus replied. "My child, I love you and I would never leave you. During the most difficult moments of your life, when you see only one set of footprints, those were the times I carried you."

We should never forget that we are yoked with Christ. To this end, it helps to start each day with a prayer like this: "Lord, help me to remember that there is no problem I am going to face today that you and I together cannot handle." This is how the yoke becomes easy and the burden light.