

The Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Take my yoke upon you, and I will give you rest.

July 5, 2020.

With the handling of the coronavirus outbreak, the racism, the U.S. presidential election in November, we are bombarded with news of leadership, or no leadership. For the same person, some journalists praise him as God sent; some label him as the world's most dangerous man. Who's right? God knows! Time will tell. In my simple-minded opinion, there are only two kinds of leaders in the world, those who use and sacrifice other people to get what they want, and those who sacrifice themselves to bring peace and prosperity to others.

This Sunday's First Reading (Zechariah 9:9-10) expresses beautifully what a true leader should be: "**Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion... your king shall come to you; a just saviour is He, meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt. ... He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem...and He shall proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion ... to the ends of the earth.**" It is a prophecy describing the Messiah, God's promised Saviour, Israel's great king, who will come and rescue Israel from idolatry and foreign oppression. The leadership style of this promised Messiah banishes chariots and horses, instruments of war used by the long time pagan conquerors of Israel for oppression, injustice, and violence. Jesus, the Messiah himself, in this Sunday's Gospel passage (Matthew 11:25-30), explains His leadership style in the same way as well. "**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.**" He invites the crowds to come to him, to follow and obey him, so that he can "give them rest." He will never force us to labor and carry heavy burdens just for his own gratification, as selfish, power-hungry leaders do. Instead, Jesus invites us to walk by his side, uniting our crosses to his, as if he and we were harnessed to the same yoke. Yes, we will have to work and suffer in this life, but when we unite ourselves to Christ, it will lead us to a joyful eternity. And so, instead of oppressing, depressing, and frustrating our souls, bearing crosses with Christ brings us deep satisfaction and peace of mind even in the midst of life's trials, even in the midst of the pandemic.

Faithful Christians are always courageous defenders of peace. Since Christ has established his own peace in their hearts, they are able to become peacemakers for others. Take St Genevieve as an example. She lived in France as a consecrated virgin in the 400s when paganism was flourishing. She stirred up a storm of opposition and suffered many calamities, slander and abuse. Her enemies even plotted to drown her. She persevered by uniting her sufferings to Christ's: finding rest by taking his yoke upon her. When Attila the Hun and his devastating army were approaching Paris in 451, the people and city leaders panicked with fear. It was St Genevieve who rallied the Christians to pray for deliverance, and arranged for a prayer vigil in the Cathedral. As St John Vianney used to say, "**God commands you to pray, but he forbids you to worry.**" For no apparent reason, Attila changed his course and the city was spared. She spent most of her time doing for others what Christ had done for her: bringing them the peace from the power of God's unconditional love. When the barbarian Frankish warrior tribes laid siege to Paris in 464, Genevieve risked her life by leading secret excursions out of the city at night in order to gather provisions for the starving Parisians. When Paris eventually fell, it was Genevieve who courageously persuaded the pagan conqueror to release his prisoners and newly enslaved Christians.

The modern world is flooded with powerful sources of external stimulation - images, sounds, media and communications technologies, travel... Just because we are followers of Christ, we aren't exempt from the onslaughts of stress, fear and anxiety that can come from this perpetual noise and activity. Each time we find ourselves under attack, we need to hear Christ's

gentle voice: "**take my yoke upon you, and I will give you rest.**" As St. Theresa of Avila says: "**Let nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you. Everything passes, God never changes. Patience obtains all. Whoever has God, lacks for nothing. God alone is enough.**" To me, that's what every good leader should tell his followers.

We used to conduct Christopher Leadership Course in Fort McMurray. The CLC provides students with opportunities to realize their full potential by developing their skills in: Effective public speaking, Positive communication, and Community leadership. Every session, we sing the Prayer of St Francis before we part. "**Lord make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, joy. O divine master grant that I may Not so much seek to be consoled as to console; To be understood as to understand; To be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it's in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen**"

Everything we do, regardless of successes and mistakes, is directed towards a greater certainty, being with God, the great leader. For this very reason, we strive to do what is right, develop our virtues and find strength that will enable us to have a holier life, to live what really pleases the Heart of Jesus. All the good examples that we try to imitate, every time we notice a lack and work on our conversion have this purpose: to achieve complete peace and happiness. For this reason, it is worth every effort and every change in life. **Being a good person, a good leader doesn't depend on our religion, status, political views, race, colour, or culture. It depends on how we treat others.** Christ brings peace to our souls. We have all experienced Christ's peace, at least a little bit. We have tasted the joy of his forgiveness in the sacrament of confession, the assurance that he is taking care of loved ones who have died, the consolation of knowing that he is near. And yet, for most of us, that interior peace is not so deep and steady as we would like. The storms of life still upset the ship of faith on which our hearts sail. Is there anything we can do to experience Christ's peace more steadily, securely, and deeply? Yes, remember what Jesus says: "**Take my yoke upon you, and I will give you rest. ... Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.**"