

14th Sunday

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7-3-11

Is everybody up to speed on what a “yoke” is? No, it’s not the yellow of an egg. Not a practical joke, as in “the yoke is on you!” A yoke is the curved wooden beam that would be placed over the shoulders of two large animals, like oxen. The yoke would have hoops that would go under the heads of the animals to hold it on. If the yoke fit properly, the oxen could pull huge plows without cuts or blisters on their skin. Jesus the carpenter would have carved exactly the right size yokes for the farmers in his neighborhood. Imagine them saying to one another, “You ought to get your next yoke from Jeshua in Nazareth. He makes a good one!”

Anyone here feel weighed down by a heavy load? Anybody wearing a yoke that you don’t remember signing up for? Jesus’ listeners had big problems: they were of course, poor, subsistence farmers in a desert; at the time of Jesus, people were sick and in pain, and too many of them blind, too many mothers watched their babies die (our parish lost a baby on Tuesday); Jesus’ people had no Independence Day, because they were pushed around by the Roman occupiers...the Romans took 35% of their income in taxes. Even religion was a terrible burden for the ordinary people of Jesus’ day: they couldn’t even read all the laws from the bible and the Pharisees, much less obey them. Poor Jews would actually pay money to the Scribes to help them understand and try to obey all the laws; the Scribes got rich.

Same struggles today, aren’t they? And sometimes we add our own burdens, and carry them around too: commitments we don’t need to say “yes” to, toys and gadgets we don’t need and cannot afford, opinions and judgments that no one has asked for.

Jesus said, “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” You might have picked that up in the first reading that “your king shall come to you...meek and riding on an ass” — which is what Jesus did on the way into Jerusalem.

Meekness and humility mean: I don’t have to do everything....I don’t have to have every experience or every item. Humility means I don’t have to have an opinion on every subject. I don’t have to go everywhere or know every one. I don’t have to always be busy, much less important or well known. [I speak to you as one with a four-inch scar on my chest from open heart surgery—not from bad genes or bad diet.]

What I have to do is humbly carry the yoke that Jesus has carved for me to wear and shoulder the burdens he has willed for me to bear. And to do that I have to come to Jesus: I have to have a spiritual life, an interior life.

Remember how a “yoke” connects the two oxen so they can together pull heavy loads? If you or I carry our yoke, who is our partner? Who is next to us, helping us up the hills? It is of course, Jesus, at our side: He helping us to shoulder the load that he wills for us. So, for those who arrived here today weary and struggling...happy feast day!