

How do we experience the presence of God

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time – July 5th, 2020

This gospel is a gospel that I read whenever I go to anoint someone.

I think it is very appropriate,

“Come to me all you that are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Often when someone is near ill and near death...as strange as it may sound...life becomes a burden.

They are tired—they have lived a long and full life—and now their body has worn out. It is like St. Paul says in his second letter to Timothy,

“I have fought the good fight...I have finished the race.”

Those who are near death know their end is in sight.

In some cases, they have already crossed over...only their bodies don't know it yet. But in the same breath they have had a lifetime to nurture the spirit of Christ within them.

I read a book about the two halves of life.

In the first half of life we are concerned with building our empires,
families, homes, securities, etc.

And this is a good thing,

because these are the structures we need in our society to function.

However, in the second half of life,

we realize that these structures are just “Things,”
and we need Christ to get us through the day.

The closer we get to death, the more we know we need Christ in our lives.

Now I am in no way saying we should expedite the process of death.

God is the source of all life, and we cannot claim that privilege...

and put anyone to death...whether they are sick, old, or even a murderer.

All life has dignity, and that dignity must...I repeat...must be respected.

However, the reality is we were not created to live forever...at least not in this life.

You might recall psalm 90,

“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong.”

When we approach the end of our days,

we yearn to have the peace that only resurrection in Christ can bring.

But back to the gospel,

“Come to me all you that are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

This applies to those who are near death.

But it also applies to us today.

If I were to ask how many of you are tired of COVID 19, I am sure that all of you would say yes. It has been 109 days since the Bishop first closed the Churches to public Masses.

Although we have since reopened, it is at reduced numbers.
This does not even begin to touch on the regulations - some businesses are putting on masks,
how schools coped—or will cope in the fall.
The number of medical personnel that are tasked with controlling the disease,
the amount of money the government is putting into it.
There is no question all of us are fed up. We just want it to be over.

And it is not just COVID 19.

Our world, our society is trying to come to terms with: Poverty, prejudice against color, abortion, crime, drugs, unemployment, debt, and a whole host of other things.

It is a wonder that any of us have any hair left.
Just waking up and listening to the news is enough to make us weary.

Which is why we need to heed this gospel even more:

“Come to me all you that are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest”
can also apply to each one of us—individually—every Sunday.

I am reminded of the advice an old priest gave to a newly ordained priest—

“Never underestimate the burdens people bring with them to the church.”

The comment that I heard most often throughout April and May was...

and it was often said in exasperation... “When are the churches going to open up?”
Not because people were in fear of falling out of the habit, of going to church.

But they knew deep down that they were weary,
and they needed the strength of the Eucharist to get them through the week.
“Spiritual Communion” through the internet was okay, but it just wasn’t cutting it.
People needed the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist to help them through the day.

Our faith is not about praying away all our problems.

There are all kinds of things we will always have to deal with.

- 1) Until Jesus comes in glory, we will experience physical death.
- 2) Jesus told us we will always have the poor with us.
- 3) There will always be wars and rumors of wars.

Our faith means that we will need to live with these issues. And that is difficult.
But this gospel tells us that we are not alone as we walk through life.

Jesus is not only walking beside us,

he is asking us to *“Come to him...and he will give us rest.”*

The image of being yoked to Jesus is one in which he shares our burden.

And not just sharing our burden—he is willing to shoulder the majority of the load.

On our part we think this is too good to be true.

We have been conditioned—from a young age—to say, “I can do it myself”—

to be independent.

Well there are some things we cannot do by ourselves...and getting through life is one of them.

Thankfully we have a Savior, who not only wants to help us,
but encourages us to seek him out...so he can help us.

In the seminary I did not take any Latin classes,

but I do remember one Latin phrase I learned in a class on liturgy.

Lex Orandi—Lex Credendi.

How we worship, is what we believe.

We tend to think of our faith in the opposite way.

What we believe is reflected in the way we worship.

But my liturgy teacher said that throughout the ages,

“the way we worship reflects what we believe.”

And this is very evident in the gospel today.

We come to church laden with our burdens.

And it is in our celebration that Christ offers to help us carry our burdens.

This means we have a God who loves us enough to help us carry our burdens.

Contrast this to an attitude that “I must come to Sunday Mass because it is my obligation.” With an attitude like, one has the image of a God who is watching you... to determine if you have fulfilled your obligation.

If you have fulfilled your obligation you will be rewarded,

if you have not fulfilled your obligation you will be judged.

So in the end you have an image of God as a judge.

“Come to me all you that are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Jesus promises us rest.

But that rest does not mean less work and more sleep.

Jesus is not proposing a social change for shorter working hours.

The rest he is talking about is the rest of the seventh day—

when God saw that what he created was good.

Rest happens when our true nature is realized.

Remember what St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”

If he was right, and Jesus promises us rest,

then he will restore to us the goodness of creation.

This inner realization of rest happens

when we live in harmony with ourselves, our neighbour, our world and ourselves.

I for one look forward to that day!