

14th Sunday in ordinary time homily 7-8-17

Turn to your neighbor and say, “Neighbor, Neighbor, God loves you ...and you can’t do anything about it!”

Today as we turn to God’s Word, we continue our journey through the Gospel of Matthew. As we mentioned last Sunday, most scripture scholars divide Matthew’s gospel into five sermons. The first is the famous sermon on the mount. The second is the missionary sermon in chapter 10. Today we hear words that come after but are very much connected with this missionary sermon to those going on mission. In fact, the words of today’s gospel are the core message of the whole Gospel. If you remember and reflect deeply o the words of today’s gospel, you will have the **WHOLE message.**

But before we get to the words of the gospel, let me tell you a story of eating in a Lebanese restaurant a few days ago. After ordering some lintel soup, hummus and a Greek salad, I took note of the extended Middle Eastern family of 20 were eating across from me. There was a little girl about two years old kept wandering away from the table... but not too far! She would repeatedly run back to her mother and receive either a reassuring smile or a hug and then she was off for another ten foot run around the table. She knew that her mother loved her and would only want what was best for her.

As I pondered and watched this child's behavior, I became aware that the child had not yet a complete identity of her own. Only in her relationship to her mother did she really have meaning or purpose in life.

Then it hit me. Our relationship with God is exactly the same as this child to its mother. Our life is incomplete and barren of ultimate meaning without our relationship with God. Today's gospel is very clear in pointing that out.

In today's gospel, we have one of the frequently quoted and consoling passages in scripture. "Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will give you rest." We face so many challenges today: family pressures, illnesses, bills... We are often very weary and we welcome the comforting words, "come to me and I will give you rest."

But the gospel words immediately before this passage are equally important. Jesus says, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father." Jesus knew something which we do not. He knew that his Father's love for him is so complete that all the Father's attention is focused on caring for his Son. God pours his Spirit of love out into his son.

Jesus seemed to realize this in a special way on the day of his baptism when he heard the words from the cloud, “This is my son, my beloved one, on whom my favor rests. Listen to him.” “And no one knows the Father except the Son.” Yes, Jesus, from the moment of his baptism, what we might call his awakening, realizes how much his Father loves him. From the energy of the Father’s love, Jesus spent the rest of his life telling us now much the Father loves love us, his adopted sons and daughters. So much so that scripture comes to a simple conclusion that God actually IS love. This is why in the gospels Jesus is always returning to his Father in prayer.

Matthew tells us that God does not reveal this Good News to the wise and learned, but to the little ones. What does God mean, the LITTLE ones. It means that God can reveal his great love only to those who realize that their true identity comes by being in union with God. Just as the child in the Lebanese family realized her existence depends on her relationship with her mother, so do the little ones of the gospel know that the love and peace they seek can only come from being in union with God.

And so, Jesus says, **COME TO ME ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY AND FIND LIFE BURDENSOME**, and I will give you rest. *This is the Good news of the gospel!* The words speak to the deepest part of our being. Just as a child is comforted by the embrace of her mother, so too are we comforted by the love of the Father revealed in Christ Jesus. Turn again to your neighbor and announce, “Neighbor, God loves you and you can’t do anything about it!”

Then Jesus finishes his instruction by saying, “Take my yolk upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.”

What is this yolk Jesus speaks of? A yolk was a wooden harness placed on the back of oxen who were pulling burdens. Usually it was a double yolk for two animals made of a single piece of wood. When Jesus says, take MY yolk, He means we are teaming up with him to carry his burden.

And what is Jesus’ burden? It is the burden of loving God and neighbor. Or put even more simply, of loving one another as God in Jesus Christ has loved you. It is simply living out the love of God which has been poured into our hearts by the Father.

Yes, Jesus says, “Take my yolk upon your shoulders and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart. For my yolk is easy and my burden light.” Once we experience the love of the Father, it becomes like a fire burning inside us. We need to share it with others. The burden, the challenge, of sharing the good news of the Father’s love for us poured out in Christ Jesus is indeed a light burden flowing out of the depths of our souls. God just cannot resist loving us. All we need to do is respond to His love by extending God’s love to our neighbor.