

Come to me all who labor and are overburdened and I will give you rest . Shoulder my yokeMatt 11:28

Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened... shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

In today's Gospel, and in the coming weeks, we have a series of teachings that Jesus gave to his disciples as he prepared them for ministry in their own communities, and for mission to their neighbors.

It wasn't easy (it still isn't easy) to be a follower of Jesus . Whilst some people welcomed these teachings, others rejected them. By the time this Gospel of Matthew was recorded, the people following the way of Jesus had been ejected from the synagogues and were persecuted throughout Israel. The work of a follower of Jesus was hard work indeed. And it certainly couldn't be done alone.

Jesus used the metaphor of shouldering a yoke with him to symbolize how a disciple should deal with the burdens of life. I'm conscious that some young people today might not know what a yoke is. So I have made one, to give you the idea of what Jesus was talking about. You can see that he is a piece of wood that connects two animals together .

In Jesus time the hardest work to be done was plowing fields for the planting of grains. The ground in Israel is very dry and hard to break up. If you were rich you plowed your field with two cows pulling a wooden plow which dug into the ground. If you were poor you had to pull the plow with human strength. You would have to shoulder a yoke with one or more companions and drag the plow through the stony ground. The yoke itself was heavy, and the burden of plowing was unimaginable.

Jesus was wanting to give his disciples a message that they should not take on the pressures of life of their own, alone. They needed to be yoked together with others. And Jesus was to be the yoke that could bind them together. He would help them plow the ground , ready for the planting of his word.

All of us will have burdens in life. Some of us here are carrying heavy burdens right now. We are not meant to carry these alone. We are meant to share them. A burden shared is a burden halved. We might feel too embarrassed to share them , but the Christian way of life is to share our burdens, in common. We are not meant to be lone rangers. And of course the really good news is that the yoke that will bind us together with others is Jesus. When we share our burdens with others, in Christ , we take on his power, we act in his strength , we share with his synchronization. To me that's great news.

80 years ago the Marist fathers yoked themselves to this community. They showed us how to be gentle and humble in heart. They have blessed many thousands of people over these years with their gentle, humble spirituality. They have given us a missionary approach to life, that has seen us engage well beyond the boundaries of this parish to communities in the South Pacific, Asia and Indian Ocean.

The announcement last week that they were to hand over the shepherding of this parish is clearly something that we are sad about, and we will miss them greatly. But they have given us the very best in a partnership that will continue to bear fruit. We have been yoked to them in our mission, and we have learned much from them. Thankyou God for the Marists.

Eight years ago some people in Timor asked us to share their burdens. We have been faithful to that request, and God has yoked us together. It is wonderful to see some of our brothers and sisters from Timor here, as they come to join in celebrating World Youth Day with us. Thank you for asking us to be yoked together, and to get to know you. You have been a great blessing to us. You have inspired us by your faithfulness. You have also showed us how to be gentle and humble in heart. We invite you to share a message from Timor with us, after our communion, and so I will keep my homily short now.

Today's message is very simple. Let us yoke ourselves together as we deal with the challenges of life. There was a great image to be seen when the soldiers returning from Iraq marched down Adelaide street last Saturday. At the very head of the parade were two Ozzy diggers shouldering a wounded mate between them. He couldn't walk by himself. Indeed they picked it up in a wheelchair to get him on parade. Carrying each other along is the Christian way of life. Don't go it alone. Share your burden's with others. Know that Christ is the yoke that will help you deal with any problem. Jesus wants us to find rest for our souls. Be gentle and humble in heart. We are companions on this journey, breaking bread and sharing life, and the love we bear and the hope we share is that we believe in the love of our God and we live it out by being yoked to our neighbour.