

Gospel: MT 11: 25-30

Have you ever thought back to what was the first thing you learned about God? What might that have been, and when did you learn it? For me, I think the first thing I learned about God was when I was in the first grade, and Sister Pacifica taught me that God loves me. She taught our class that God loves us more than our families love us, more than anyone else loves us. And this is probably the most important thing I have ever learned about God –that he loves me. And for some time that’s all I knew about God. Then I began to learn more, possibly taking the focus off of his love. That God exists as a Trinity is important to know, but not as important as his love. He’s eternal - important but not as important. He’s the all-powerful creator of everything – still not as important. What was it Jesus said, “[A]lthough you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to the childlike.” It seems that God still revealed the most important aspect of himself to little ones, at least those of us in Sister’s class.

One of the most popular readings at weddings is First Corinthians chapter 13 in which Paul writes about love. I suggest that you take some time to read it through the first part of verse 8, but substitute God for love and he for it. Everything Paul wrote about love is equally true of God.

Jesus starts to bring the reality of God’s love home for us when he tells us "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." And later, [Y]ou will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." This metaphor of a yoke would be clear to Jesus’ hearers. Peasants always had a yoke laid upon them, by the landowners whose property they worked as tenant farmers, by religious leaders, by the Roman occupiers with their crippling taxes, and by the Pharisees who laid the yoke of 613 commandments on the peasants who sought their advice as to how to please God. Contrast that with the yoke Jesus lays on them and on us. Love God with our whole being and our neighbor as ourselves. Besides loving us, God wants us to love him in return, and he also wants us to love those whom he loves.

Jesus’ promise of rest does not mean we don’t have to work, to struggle as we make our way through our lives. As he was expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, God told Adam, “By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat.” Jesuit Father John Foley writes “Maybe labor and burdens are not meant to be erased from our lives, not expunged or thrown away. Instead maybe they are meant to be pathways to a solid ground far underneath our troubles, into a quiet grounding where there is real stillness and rest.”

If we bring our burdens to Jesus, but they don’t get lifted from our shoulders, we need to consider the reason for our burdens. Oftentimes they are self-inflicted. Are we late with a project or are ill-prepared for a presentation at work because we have not put forth adequate effort or took it on knowing it’s beyond our capabilities? Many of our burdens are financial. Is this a result of excessive or reckless spending on worldly goods rather than being good stewards of God’s gifts to us? As Fr. John has said regarding sacrificial

charitable giving, God will never be outdone in generosity. During our school days, did we find ourselves facing a test where we have not studied or paid attention in class? Years ago, I was watching The Simpsons and Bart found himself in that situation. So he knelt down and began to pray. Lisa walked past his room, saw Bart on his knees, and commented, "Prayer, the last refuge of the scoundrel." As Catholics, we know that prayer is far more than the last refuge of the scoundrel. Nevertheless, our Lord's promise of rest does not absolve us of our personal responsibility.

If we find ourselves facing important life decisions, and these life decisions can often be the heaviest of burdens, decisions such as deciding to marry a specific person (and I heard a political commentator I rarely agree with say who we marry is the most important decision we ever make), having or raising children, buying a home, or changing jobs it's always a good idea to prayerfully ask for God's help with that decision. Then we need to do something we don't seem to be wired to do. We need to quietly, and patiently listen for his answer. He will guide us along the right path. After all, he loves us.