

“And I will give you rest”-July 5th, 2020-Matthew 11:25-30

An elderly woman was the only passenger in the express elevator as it left the downstairs lobby and headed for the twentieth floor.

It was late afternoon, and it was evident that she was weary and exhausted from the heat of the day. She stood alone in the center of the elevator, her shoulders drooping with the weight of the two heavy bundles she was carrying, one in each hand.

The elevator operator, a pleasant young lady, turned to the older woman and said, “You can put your bundles down, madam. The elevator will carry them.”

Boy, what a relief when you know something is there to help carry your burdens. Have you felt yourself feeling a little bit burdened these days? Who doesn't with so much uncertainty in the world right now, but thankfully, we are reminded today that there is one who has invited us when we are feeling labored and burdened to come to Him to find rest. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who says to us, **“Come to me, all who labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**

It is that open invitation of Jesus that stands for all of us, and it can mean all the more when we understand what is that rest Jesus is talking about.

For in today's Gospel, we find Jesus speaking to the crowds of his day in Galilee. It was after he had been healing many of their sick and had sent out his disciples to proclaim the message of repentance and the kingdom and to also heal the sick and cast out demons in his name. However, despite all the clear evidence the crowds had seen from Jesus and his work in his disciples that he was their Messiah, many of them remained in unbelief.

They thought this can't be the Messiah. He is from Nazareth and the son of a carpenter. He is too meek and forgiving. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. He isn't bearing a sword or speaking rebellion against Rome. From the religious leader's perspective, Jesus wasn't following their laws enough to be the Messiah.

Therefore, according to their wisdom and understanding, Jesus just didn't fit their expectations for the Messiah, so they were not receiving His message and following Him.

It is why we find Jesus before the words of our Matthew text, saying, “Woe to you, Chorazin, Woe to you, Bethsaida” because they were not repenting of their sins and receiving the message of the Kingdom.

It is the background behind those words of Jesus in Matthew 11, where he says, **“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.”**

It was Jesus thanking his Father, that while many were rejecting him who considered themselves wise and learned, some were hearing his message and receiving and accepting it, like little children, through the Father's revelation. People like fishermen and tax collectors and those considered unwise, foolish by many in the world. They were the little children, who did not think too highly of their own wisdom to listen and take to heart the revelation of His Father; that to see Jesus was to see their Messiah and their Lord. Jesus reveals it would be them who would receive the rest promised through the Messiah.

You see, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious leaders, had been burdening the people of Israel with rules and demands beyond God's Law for years.

They were later recorded in the Mishnah, rules like you were not allowed to write on the Sabbath or rip up parchment because it was considered work. You couldn't climb a tree or water your plants or make a bouquet of flowers. The Mishnah included 39 categories of labors that were forbidden on the Sabbath. On top of that, they required that Jews pilgrimaged if they could three times a year to Jerusalem for Jewish festivals and required them to pay the temple tax and give their sacrifices and offerings to the priests in the temple.

It was a religion of great burden upon the people, but they would observe and try to do these things beyond God's Law because they thought this was what gained them favor before God and eternal rest from their burdens. However, there is no peace or rest in a religion of works. It only demands more. More prayers, more devotion, more obedience.

And so it was to those people, Jesus cries. Come to me, all who are labored and heavy laden by all those demands and find rest for your souls.

It is where Jesus makes the same call to us. You maybe at times in your life have also felt yourself burdened by the need to satisfy others expectations for you. You tried so hard in school to get really good grades because you didn't want to disappoint your parents. You maybe tried really hard to be that star athlete or first chair musician because it was what other people wanted for you, but you felt no peace in the pursuit, only its burden.

Perhaps you have felt that same way with God at times. You maybe had the misunderstanding that you had to meet all of God's expectations to live under His favor, and it just left you depressed and hopeless and without peace. You only saw your failings and sins and you thought what is the point? Religion is too hard. Too demanding. You had no true rest or peace in your faith life.

However, it is too all of us who have maybe been in that place or are currently in that place that Jesus gives an invitation and promise. A promise that you can find rest in Him from the guilt and burdens you feel. He invites you to

take his yoke upon you and to learn from him because He is gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

He says that because His yoke, unlike the yoke the religious leaders put on their people or maybe the yoke your parents or coaches put on you to succeed and be a certain way, is light. It is light because his yoke doesn't come with certain expectations to earn a rest or earn good graces.

Like in the movie Remember the Titans where Coach Boone says to his players, "We will be perfect every day in every aspect of the game. You drop a pass, you run a mile. You miss a blocking assignment, you run a mile. You fumble the football. You will run a mile. Perfection! Let's get to work." It is how some people can view God, but not the God we have in Jesus.

Jesus came that we might hear His Word, learn from Him as our gentle and lowly Messiah, and find that rest for our souls that isn't something that can be earned, but is something given as a gift.

It is found in the forgiveness of sins offered us through him. It is found in the salvation he purchased for us that you don't have to earn. His invitation is to realize He took on the burden to fulfill God's law and did it perfectly in your place, so that the burden to fulfill God's Law to be saved wouldn't fall on you. Without Him, our sin warrants us only pain and death. With Him, the condemnation for our sins is taken away.

He just invites you to come and receive it. Not as a burden, but as an invitation of rest. Receive His forgiveness freely offered you, as you confess your sins, burdens, and guilt's to Him, and you will receive nothing but open arms to embrace you and forgive you and give you the peace that through Christ, you do not have to worry about your relationship with God and your future salvation. You can rest secure that Christ's forgiveness gives you eternal rest with God, His Father and in that is rest of our souls.

It also means that Christ invites you to follow Him as a disciple, to be yoked to Him, knowing His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He wants to help you carry your burdens. He wants to see you through this life with his peace. He wants to get you to the final destination of your eternal rest with Him by carrying your burdens and sins continually to His cross and forgiving them and it is why we can truly call Him our Savior.