

9 July 2017 Matthew 11.25-30
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.
Reverend Michael Mateljan

A few days ago I was fossicking about in my study and came across a little something that I once found in an old English Missal - Vesting Prayers. For some, the priest putting on vestments before Church begins is nothing more than 'getting dressed'. Well it is more than that; it is more akin to a pre-liturgical ritual of preparation to remind the priest that he or she is about to embark on a continuing journey with the people of God.

Kissing the Amice

Set upon my head, O lord, the
helmet of salvation that I may
overcome the assaults of the devil,

Putting on the Alb

Make me white, O Lord, and cleanse
my heart that being made white in
the blood of the Lamb, I may attain
to joy everlasting.

Putting on the Girdle

Gird me about, O Lord, with the
girdle of chastity and quench the
flames of lust, that the virtue of
continence and purity may
evermore abide in me.

Kissing the Maniple

Give me grace O Lord, so to bear
the maniple of tears of sorrow, that
I may with joy receive the reward
of my labours.

Kissing the Stole

Restore to me, O Lord, the stole of
immortality, which I lost through
the transgression of my first
parents; that though I be unworthy
to approach thy sacred mysteries, I
may yet be accounted meet for
eternal joy.

Putting on the Chasuble

O Lord, who has said, my yoke is
easy and my burden light, grant me
so to bear it that I may obtain thy
grace. Amen.

These prayers, including the language, are quite ancient, and indeed steeped in the scriptures. They are reminders to help the priest focus on the reason we are gathered here as the People of God and that we share that focus with millions of people worldwide. The very last part of the prayer (putting on the chasuble) should ring in our ears today, following the Gospel passage proclaimed today.

Here today Jesus calls us to listen carefully and take note of what it means to follow Him. Listening carefully means putting aside those things that may distract us and focusing on the essence of the message. Sometimes we are so busy worrying about the here and now

that we can miss the things that are really important, and may in fact be a relief to us rather than the burden we perceive them to be. It is very difficult to turn ourselves off to those things that tend to take a grip on our lives when the focus is on ourselves and so there is often a need to make a deliberate attempt to be the people that our heavenly Father would have us be. The clue for us is in verse 29 of today's Gospel reading, ***"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."***

In the past, particularly when I was a Police Officer, I have found that it was an easier thing to do the right thing. The consequences of doing the wrong thing meant that there was no rest for the wicked so to speak.

In the Gospel reading this morning we hear how Jesus takes those who are following him into the market place, to remind them what happens there. This is a place where people gather, perhaps to sell their wares, or spruce their ideas, or just to be seen by grasping whatever was available to them - usually things without substance. He makes the point that we do not make our mark by carrying on in an effort to get the attention of others, or by putting others down. I remember a small cartoon depicting a person blowing out a candle, with the caption: ***"Don't extinguish someone else's light in order that your light will shine brighter."*** It just doesn't work that way.

So this morning's Gospel does not seek to give us any specific things that we must do in order to find rest for our souls, but does make a plea for us to follow Jesus' teachings which call us to focus on those things that are important to realising God's kingdom.

During the course of this celebration of the Eucharist we will have gathered in prayer, heard from the Holy Scriptures, prayed for each other, the world and the state of God's church, given thanks for all of God's gifts, and finally having been given God's blessings as we go out into the world we hear the final words of the liturgy, ***"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."*** So, the message here is, don't leave the yoke behind because it won't be of much use to you or anyone else if it is left here.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."