

Homily 14th Sunday Year A 2023

Do you remember the holograms, including holy ones, in which the image changed by moving your head e.g. Jesus with his eyes open and Jesus with his eyes shut. It was the same Jesus in each case. The development of Christianity picked up on the duality expressed in the readings, Spirit and flesh, the material world and the spiritual world, life and death and they saw them at odds with each other. Although this is true, there are also times when they work in harmony with each other for the good. Without the spirit of life, the flesh is just an earthenware jar. The Spirit needs our hands, ears, eyes and mouths to reach out to people. We are aware from the Gospels that failure can lead to a stronger faith and commitment to the Way of Jesus: Peter, Paul, Thomas . . . One of the riches of the early spiritualities before Christ is that they believed that the spirit and the world were intricately related, just like our commandment to Love God and love our neighbour. You cannot do one without the other.

Maybe our question is how do we tap in to this flow of life and spirit and not erect barriers to it. Jesus offers a very simple solution in offering us his yoke. *"A farmer was ploughing his field with a team of Oxen. One of the animals was a little bigger than the other. When asked why he did this, the farmer said that the big animal was an older animal that was well trained and the smaller one was a young animal that was new to the yoke. He explained that older ox is the best ox he'd ever had; he knows his way around the field. The reason for putting the younger one with him is so that the older, more knowledgeable ox could teach him how to plough. If I never put them together the younger one would never learn. By himself the younger ox would pull himself to death, but together he learns to cooperate with and rest in the strength of the older ox."*

In accepting Jesus' yoke, Jesus journeys with us and we will discover how the Spirit of life flows through good and bad alike, flows through creation and flows through each of us. This kind of life-flow will include self-sacrifice, fasting from doing just what ones wants to do, forgiving people who have hurt you intentionally or otherwise, not being thanked for help offered and given. But all of these deprivations and sacrifices lead to a life that is enriched and strengthened more than in any other way.

Another reflection on the Gospel puts it this way: *Jesus offers a yoke that fits us perfectly. One that is light and pleasant to bear. It is the yoke of Faith. It no longer hitches us to the burden of sin and the death it brings. This yoke of Faith hitches us to the freedom of forgiveness, and eternal life in Christ. This yoke connects us to the master Jesus Christ. It is a yoke tailor made to each one of us by Christ himself. It is a yoke that he gladly bears with us, so that he can help us to walk the straight paths God has put before us, and so that he can lend us strength and life and vigour for the task when we have none of our own. It is a yoke not made out of some cold, inanimate material. It is a yoke formed by Christ's arms wrapped around us in love, to protect and guide and lift us up in love.*

Jesus also makes clear that to be open to the life, goodness, mercy and love that he offers we have to become more like children. This does not mean be childish. Children have a simplicity of outlook, an understanding of doing things that is open and refreshing. It is this openness that Jesus requires otherwise he is unable to help us.

Man walks into a bar with a mouse:

"What are you doing with that yoke in here?" asks the barman.

The man replies "Well I have a proposition for you. The mouse gets to stay and I get a full bottle of good whiskey if I can show you this mouse playing the piano!"

"Deal" says the barman, not believing this possible. The man sets the mouse on the table, brings out a tiny piano and, lo and behold, the mouse starts playing Mozart!

"That's incredible" says the barman, and readily hands over the bottle. The man fills himself a glass and then puts a toad on the table.

"You're pushing your luck" says the barman.

"Well I have another proposition for you. If this toad can sing, he can stay and I get a bottle of brandy"

says the man.

"Deal" says the barman, believing this impossible too. Well, before their very eyes the toad sang 'Old man river' all the way through.

A regular down the bar pipes up as the brandy is being passed over shouting "I'll give you fifty quid for the frog!".

"Deal" says the man and they make the exchange, the regular leaves the pub delighted with himself.

"I know it's really not any of my business but you just have away a fortune you know" says the barman to the man.

"Not really" says the man. "The mouse is also a ventriloquist!".