

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A – July 5, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 8:30 & 11:00am Sunday Masses – 875 words

Our non-Catholic Christian friends tend to emphasize the primacy of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; going to church – and for some, even being baptized – is secondary, if not unnecessary. But the risk we Catholics run, with our emphasis on common liturgical worship and a prayer life rooted in the seven sacraments, is that of diminishing the importance of having that personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Today's gospel is an important corrective in that regard. For us, yes, the sacramental life and liturgical worship are essential. But it is equally important that we know the one whom we worship and meet in the sacraments – and indeed, that we come to know him intimately. The challenge, as in so many areas of Catholic life, is to embrace the “both/and” – the bigger picture.

“Come to me”, Jesus says. What a beautiful passage – one of the most consoling in all of sacred scripture! How appealing, the thought of finding rest in him and learning from him. And amidst the heavy burdens we carry through this valley of tears, how wonderful it sounds, that with him, our load may be easier and lighter. But for however beautiful this passage is, it's also equally difficult to put into practice. How many of us have really succeeded in laying down our burdens at the Lord's feet and finding relief and rest there? Maybe there are moments, but then we turn on the news again and hear about the latest calamity, the bad news *du jour*, some other thing to worry about. We are continually being challenged in new ways – and thus we continually learn how far we still have to go.

This gospel challenges us to consider how self-abandonment to Christ is, in fact, a path to greater intimacy with him. The cross, as we regularly encounter it, is really too heavy for us; but it is nothing for our Lord. When he tells us that his yoke is easy and his burden light, he says that as the one who would bear the weight of the whole world in his passion and death. He says it as almighty God, for whom there can be no limitation. And he further challenges us, in this connection, with the task of being childlike; to be “little ones”. A little child depends totally upon his parents, and even as he sees his parents as great and powerful, he also feels loved. So, too, should we cultivate the sense of smallness before God and utter dependence upon him – and also of being profoundly loved by him.

In the context of that littleness before the Lord, in which we strive to depend more fully on him like a child and see how he loves us, we can also gain better perspective on the true weight of our crosses. For they are truly only a tiny sliver of what he bore as a whole. And if the total burden for him is light, then our small portion of it is as nothing – for him, at least. But here is precisely where an intimate dialogue with the Lord can help us experience an ease of burden as we abandon ourselves more fully. We can find rest, as we learn from him – there, in the shelter of his Most Sacred Heart, wounded for our offenses. For there we behold the reality of his suffering and see that our present difficulties were included in his passion and death, and so redeemed also by his Resurrection.

Yes, we need to make ourselves small before him and see that he loves us – but we must also speak to him about our burdens and see them in context with his. This requires an investment of time – and it presupposes that silence within which we may not only speak but also hear, perceiving his response. But do we really offer our Lord quality time? And how can we possibly hear him, if we make him compete with this world's noise? Think of the beauty of a mother resting with her child on her shoulder. Noise is one of the greatest enemies of peace today. We do well to set aside this time of liturgical worship and to participate in the sacraments. But we do better if it then leads us to other meaningful times of recollection, in which we can learn from and rest with the Lord Jesus.

The Lord's "dominion [is] from sea to sea", the first reading instructed us. "He shall proclaim peace to the nations". How we yearn to experience this peace within the security of his reign. But the way to it is not through any noisy show of power, but through meekness and childlikeness. He modeled this for us himself by riding into Jerusalem on an ass – on a rather slow, unintelligent beast of burden – in fulfillment of the prophecy. That slow, steady, and humble approach is our way forward also: seeking him out regularly – in silence; being small before him and knowing that he loves us; contemplating the weight that he bore; seeing our burden within it and abandoning ourselves to him; and learning, as he whispers quietly to our hearts. This is what he offers when he says, "Come to me... and I will give you rest".