

Read

Zechariah 9:9-10

Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9,
10-11, 13-14

Romans 8:9, 11-13

Matthew 11:25-30

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 9, 2023



REFLECTION

It can be hard for people in authority to admit to ignorance or be open to correction. We see this all the time when a politician flubs an answer to a question she wasn't prepared for. You've probably run across at least one teacher who acts personally attacked if a student corrects him. The first step to learning anything is being able to admit to your own ignorance. This is why teachers say that "there's no such thing as a stupid question." You can't get answers to questions you never ask! Unfortunately, the world is not easy on the poor and powerless! In Jesus' time, as in ours, the common people were under the authority of numerous people and forces: landlords and work overseers, religious leaders, teachers, elders, Jewish secular authorities, and Roman occupying forces. These authorities could layer obligation upon obligation onto those who were already suffering. Jesus comes with authority, but his gentle authority is of a different kind. He doesn't come to free us from all obligations, but comes to walk with us. His yoke is light because he walks alongside us and shares our burdens.



QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Do you ever feel overburdened by the expectations laid on you by those in authority over you? What would make their rules and restrictions easier to bear?
- ❖ What kind of leader are you when you are given authority over someone else?



ACTION

Jesus is the leader who comes to serve others. In order to follow him, we must adopt this attitude and rely on him with childlike faith—complete and utter trust in him. The simplicity of this is deceptive because it can be a challenge for us to let go of our perception of control and let Jesus bear the burdens with us, leading us to heaven. Ask him to show you how you can share in his servant leadership in your community; being humble and bearing one another's burdens. Make a list of ways that you could work toward this over the next several weeks.



"Whoever keeps their gaze fixed on Jesus learns to live in order to serve. They do not wait for others to start, but set out to seek their neighbor."

—Pope Francis @Pontifex



July 9, 2023

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #100A

Zechariah 9:9-10

Psalms 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14

Romans 8:9, 11-13

Matthew 11:25-30

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel passage comes to us in the form of a prayer and invitation. The prayer makes better sense when we understand it in context: The Son of God had been personally visiting various towns, teaching, proclaiming, and healing, and yet he still experienced rejection. In response, Jesus strongly criticized all those who were unmoved and unrepentant (a few verses before today's Gospel passage). But before he walked away, he praised God the Father for those who have responded with faith. So often, when we try and fail at something, our response is to be critical of what went wrong, but Jesus reminds us to also praise God for what went well. Moreover, Christ invites everyone who feels like they have failed according to societal standards to come find the spiritual rest in himself.

Q FOCUS: Express gratitude for goodness to the Father; come rest in the peace of the Son.

Liturgical Calendar Connection

July 14 is the feast of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first female Native American saint. Kateri lived in the mid-1600s in upstate New York during a time of tremendous tension between the native peoples and the French. When she was a young child, her family died of smallpox. Though she survived, her vision was impaired. Kateri's uncle, who took her in, was strongly

opposed to Christianity. Nevertheless, when Kateri was eighteen, she began the process of becoming a Christian. After her baptism, Kateri fled to a mission in Canada to escape the ridicule she faced from her village. She helped minister to others and grew in her faith life. She dedicated herself to a life of virginity and prayer. She died at the age of twenty-four, professing her love of Jesus until the very end.

Church Teaching Connection

"Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, because there we will discover all the goodness that God has planted in human hearts. Difficulties that seem overwhelming are opportunities for growth, not excuses for a glum resignation that can lead only to acquiescence. Yet let us not do this alone, as individuals. . . . Let us stop feeling sorry for ourselves and acknowledge our crimes, our apathy, our lies" (*Fratelli tutti*, 78).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 11:25-30

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

At that time Jesus exclaimed: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the

learned you have revealed them to little ones. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

At this point in the Gospel, Jesus had just been all over the region of Galilee, teaching, preaching, and performing miracles. Yet, again and again he kept encountering opposition and rejection. Despite all his good works and mighty deeds, many stubbornly and arrogantly refused to believe. In response, Jesus reproached the unrepentant towns, shouting “Woe to you!” (Matthew 11:21). Essentially, things were not going well, and Jesus was trying to get across the seriousness of what was happening. It was in the midst of this exasperation and pointed criticism that Jesus offers his praise to God for what was going well. Despite all the unbelief, there were some who did listen, repent, and believe.

► When things aren't going well, are you able to see the good in the midst of it all? Or do you just focus on what is wrong?

At the time of Jesus, scribes and Pharisees were the learned religious scholars. They read and studied Scripture and took responsibility for religious instruction. Whether they arrogantly presumed to know it all or they just didn't like how Jesus

challenged them, they were adamantly closed-minded. Thanks to the grace of God, acceptance of Jesus depends only upon our openness. Being open is not as easy as it sounds; it takes both courage and wisdom. When we are open to new ideas, we still need to filter them with truth, goodness, and love. When our hearts and minds are truly open, we are using God's gift of reason to think critically and ask why we accept or reject certain ideas or actions.

► How might an attitude of openness impact a person's path of discipleship?

After praising God for goodness amid frustration, Jesus invites all disciples to come to him, especially if they are tired and frustrated. Jesus saw the weariness of people burdened by the laws that the Pharisees and scribes put upon them. It was overcomplicating their relationship with God.

Instead, Jesus invites us to take up his yoke. Very few of us today are familiar with a yoke; some hear it spoken as “yolk” and think Jesus is talking about eggs. A yoke was a curved beam of wood that lays across the back of the necks of two animals (like oxen), to be used for pulling heavy objects. To take Christ's yoke upon us means to be obedient to his Word and to share with him the burden. By telling us that his yoke is easy, Jesus promises that while discipleship will require effort, it will not be a heavy burden, and in it, we will find the rest of inner peace.

► What are some burdens people carry that cause unrest? How can discipleship bring inner peace?

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 218.

Jesus honestly acknowledges frustration, yet still praises God for the moments of goodness.

To be a disciple of Jesus one must only have a heart and mind open to goodness and truth.

Jesus invites us to come to him, to take on the work of discipleship, and promises that we will find true rest in him.

Act on the Word

Come to Me

For this activity, you will need blue painter's tape to create a clearly marked line.

This activity is a variation of the icebreaker "Have You Ever," phrased as Christ's invitation. Use blue painter's tape to mark a line in the center of the room. Rearrange furniture so there is space for teens to move around. Begin by having everyone gather around the perimeter of the room. Explain the game to the teens using these or similar words:

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus invite anyone who is tired and frustrated to come to him. In reality that invitation occurs in every moment of every day, in every area of life, regardless of how we feel. We often forget this in our prayer life. Some of us only talk to God about the good things in our life; others only pray when we're in dire need. Jesus wants all parts of us—the good, the bad, and everything in between. So, let the blue tape line represent this invitation of Christ to share everything with him; hold nothing back. I will read aloud some thoughts, feelings, and actions. If you are or have recently thought, felt, or done those things, you are invited to come step on the blue tape line. If it's not a reflection of you at this time in your life, stand against a different wall.

"Come to me if you are . . ." (Repeat with each prompt.)

- * tired.
- * burdened with something difficult.
- * happy or excited about something.
- * frustrated with something.

* dealing with illness or injury.

* helping someone.

* a leader with responsibility.

* concerned about someone you love.

* struggling with academics.

* working hard on something.

Then invite the teens to take turns leading their own "Come to me if you are . . ." Continue as time permits.

Conclude with a gentle reminder that when we heed this call, we are promised the spiritual rest of Christ's peace in our hearts.

Closing Prayer

*God of the earth,
from the beginning of creation,
you rested on the seventh day.*

*Be with us as we seek to trust in you
so that we will renew ourselves
by resting in your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity*

*of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.*

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.