**5TH SUNDAY after PENTECOST SERMON**

For the past several Sundays, our Gospel readings dealt with the burdens and costs of discipleship --- of following Christ; and burdens and costs of Apostleship --- of being sent into the world to share the Good news.

Today, I would like to reflect with you the last verses of our gospel reading where Jesus says, ***28\* Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29\* Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30\* For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

These most assuring words will most assuredly be better appreciated if we make a brief background remark about this gospel passage.

In the NT, we know that during the years that Jesus lived in Nazareth, he lived as an ordinary man among ordinary people. There he saw how the Scribes and Pharisees made their already difficult lives, more burdensome: by requiring them the literal observance of the Law of Moses. As if not enough, they even added hundreds more of their own rules and regulations to add to the people’s burdens.

Jesus, personally, saw all this first-hand. He was fully aware of the struggles and frustrations that the ordinary people had to endure and the heavy burdens that life placed on their shoulders.

Consequently, Jesus felt deeply for these people and wanted to lighten their loads. People came to him from all walks of life and from very far distances with their burdens of sickness and misery. All of them had their burdens lightened by Jesus. His mere presence could bring peace to an anguished soul.

Jesus says these words again today in the gospel reading: He addresses us who are burdened by the sicknesses and death brought about by the corona virus; the anxieties and frustrations, inconveniences and boredom brought about by social distancing and the wearing of mask. There are many of us who face the burden of coping with this pandemic all alone. Still others have the burden of broken relationships with either their children, their spouses or their relatives. Still others face the burden of making both ends meet, wondering what they will do with their lives. For some particular groups -- burdens of racial inequality and discrimination.

Jesus is saying in our language, *come to me all who are struggling with life in any way and those of you who have burdens that you cannot carry alone,*

*and I will help you with your struggles. Jesus not only knows what he is saying; he knows that he can still do what he is saying.* So, how can Jesus help us with our burdens?

First, Jesus helps us by doing something like this little story: ***When our daughter was a little girl, she wanted to help around the house. She liked to help move things around. She liked to help move chairs around, but when she does, I need to pick up the chair in such a way that I am carrying most of it and she is helping by carrying a much smaller load***. In a like manner, Jesus lightens our loads by bearing most of the weights of our chairs in life, of our burdens, our cares, our struggles. Jesus tells us loud and clear that we don’t have to live life alone, but yet we must bring them to him. And then he will shoulder them with us, in fact, he will take most of the weight of our burdens upon himself.

Secondly, even if Jesus will carry the heavier end of the chair, we still need to carry the other end… even if it is lighter. What I want to say is that we have the power to lighten some of our own loads. You see, some of our burdens are self-imposed. For example, do we charge too much on our credit cards, that we have the burden of making ends meet at the end of the month? Do we carry around grudges and bitterness over things that happened in the past? Do we eat too much that we carry the burden of our weight? Do we carry around the burdens of guilt, shame, doubt and regret?

Thirdly, And I know that it will sound corny, but only with love can Jesus help us lighten our burdens. For Only love can make a heavy load seem light. *There is an old story which tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy who was lame upon his back. "That’s a heavy burden for you to carry, said the man. ’"That’s no burden," came the answer. "That’s my little brother."* ***29\* Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30\* For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

Following Jesus should not make life more burdensome. If Jesus placed any burden on us at all, it was the burden of loving one another. That’s all—nothing more. So if Jesus helps us carry our burdens, it is so that we can be an instrument of love to others, to help others carry their burdens.

Jesus doesn’t completely take our burdens away from us but he does give us the strength to bear them. While faith makes all things possible, love makes all things easy. Let these be our guiding thoughts and sentiments.