

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost July 5, 2026 jj
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✠ sdg ✠

This jubilee Fourth of July, no doubt there were brought to mind many blessings of freedom that God allowed to touch our land, for which we rightfully and continually should thank and praise Him. One of the most precious of those blessings was that our now-250-year-old nation was conceived with the distinct purpose to serve as a refuge for those people fleeing the persecution and blight of their home countries. No one grasped the import of this blessing better than the Jewish poet Emma Lazarus, who wrote a poem in 1883 during a fund-raising campaign to arrange for the installation of the Statue of Liberty, which as you may know, came to us as a gift from France. In the last half of her poem, "The New Colossus," she assumes Lady Liberty's voice as she penned those beautiful words: "'Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!' cries she/With silent lips. 'Give me your tired, your poor,/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,/The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,/Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,/I lift my lamp beside the golden door!'"

While such verses could stir even the coldest of hearts to patriotic fervor, perhaps the source of comfort one finds within this more diminutive American symbol lies deeper than mere national pride, and even goes beyond the heart-wrenching collective history of all those countless immigrants; indeed they started out tired and poor but with freedom's encouragement they tapped into their true potential and became the strong, productive backbone of our nation. Yet we also hear those words in our day with a half-cynical side-cock of the head—you know, Ms Lazarus, there are way too

many are out there assuming the guise of wretched and needy, but then they capitalize on our land's generosity and content themselves with remaining no better than leeching refuse. Nothing in this earthly world is more costly than that which is handed out for free.

It seems that the author herself, based on her religious convictions, was tragically ignorant of the ultimate fountainhead of the free-flowing peace she attempted to extol in verse. For though the so-called "Mother of Exiles" may be commended for offering safe haven for the huddled masses, you have just heard in today's Gospel Jesus the world's Savior call out to all people, homeless, tempest-tossed or not, when He says, "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." These words written by the Evangelist Matthew are the true source of comfort. They are perfect words that come through on their promise every time. They do not encourage lazy people to demand preferential treatment as though they were entitled to it. The soothing words of Christ rather offer the peace that the world cannot give to all who by God's grace would hear Him.

That is nice of our Lord to make an offer like that, isn't it? It's really great that the church is there for the people who need it. That you can toil and labor and face the troubles of this world, then come to this place as a sanctuary to be refreshed and recharged. Because you are here, you must have heard of this spiritual benefit of coming to church, or you have been diligently taught it so that it permanently

sticks with you, and several of you would miss it terribly if you couldn't make it week after week. Just as the ever-famous Statue in New York harbor and all it stands for still welcomes the oppressed to our shores, so also Jesus, the Lord of the Church, extends His offer of rest now as before and to the end of time. As countries come and go, communities shift in demographics and economics, human institutions rise and fall, however the Church (whether that includes an impressive building or not) will always be the refuge that Christ Our Savior established on His Holy Word. He will never leave you without that comfort. If you think that this is a necessity for the Christian life, then you would be right, and so here you are.

But you may know others who seem to be convinced that it is not so necessary. You may have felt the same way at one time, or you are aware of your own family and friends who declare confidently, "I don't need to go to church." Yet they too seem to feel compelled to offer reasons and excuses, ranging from criticism of pastors or parishioners to guilt over not giving an offering with everything these days getting so expensive. The world seems to go along just fine with its Sunday chores, three-day weekends, sports schedules and summer trips, and fitting in a visit to God's house just doesn't hold the same priority. Often there's a weak objection raised that starts out sounding good, like "I know God has already forgiven me. Jesus died for me. That's got to count for something." But then it concludes defiantly, "Why do I need to spend time putting on good clothes, and sitting here for somebody else to tell me that? I know all I need to know. All that stuff you do at church, it's just not my

thing." No doubt someone has told you that at some time or another.

And that can make you start wondering, Is it true that some people need God's comfort more than others? Could it be that I have less of a spiritual maturity because I lean on what Jesus says more heavily than others? Or is it the other way around? Such thinking could quickly get you very confused, and then the devil would just love to pounce and plant even more seeds of doubt, or arrogance, or a strange mixture of both, to make it worse. The problem is you cannot consistently feel the burden or the spiritual need that you have. Anyone who tries to put their perfectly human, up-and-down emotions together with their Christian life is going to be tripped up somewhere along the way, guaranteed. In fact, you may not even know you are burdened and heavy laden until God's Word reveals that to you. The burden you have is your sin, that ugly, fallen condition into which you were born and from which you do the thoughts, words and deeds that displease God. But you wouldn't know you were sinning unless you had God's holy commandments telling you what He desires.

Consider St. Paul, who wrote the section in Romans you just heard as our Epistle. He freely admitted that he wanted to do what was good, because he was reborn through Baptism as God's child. Yet at the same time, his sinful nature, or his flesh, actually did the very opposite of that good. This is no cop-out, like someone saying, The devil made me do it. Rather, it's fully admitting that without God's grace, we are incapable of pleasing our heavenly Father. God's law, in which you and Paul both delight, and desire to follow, is at the same time condemning you of your sin, making you

wretched with a heavy burden that is too much to bear. You are weary from trusting in yourself; anxious from worrying, and it's a common condition for all Christians. How are you going to deal with it? Will you compensate with some combination of diversion, drugs or denial? Or will despair be your waterless pit?

Come unto Me, Jesus says. Hand over your sinful burden to Him, for He cares for you. Delight in His forgiveness and renewal for your life. Zechariah, the prophet who predicted Jesus' Palm Sunday donkey-ride, says, Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope. And he adds that the Lord will restore to you double, that is, a greater blessing than before. An abundance of grace that more than covers over your sin, on the pattern of Job, who after his incredible suffering, was doubly rewarded at the end of the story. Check it out for yourself in the book that bears his name. The one just before the Psalms, which are also great to read.

For that double reward was earned for you and all people with the Son's precious blood. He died on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day, all so that you would be delivered from this body of death and sin. You have rest, that is, full salvation and freedom from the law's condemnation, all because the Lord chose you and turned your heart toward Himself with His word of forgiveness. Evil may be ready to attack at any time, but your righteous King will strengthen you against every adversary, including the enemy you look at in the mirror. It is the greatest mystery in the entire world, yet God has revealed this truth even to little children. The so-called wise and understanding don't see the need for it all. But you know it, because Jesus speaks

peace to you, and you know He speaks that peace right here out of His Word and in His holy Sacraments.

Then with that peace, the Son of God bestows His yoke, His burden upon you. Don't be alarmed. You are not getting rid of one heavy burden, namely sin, in order to get saddled down with another one like it. No, because Jesus promised you, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." This isn't your obligation to earn God's love—Christ accomplished that already. He's referring to your holy calling, specific to you and your talents and gifts that your heavenly Father lavished upon you for the benefit and help of others. It's what you love and enjoy without sinful pride gaining a foothold. Jesus says, My yoke is easy, because He gives you no temptation or test beyond what you can bear. But the only way you can bear it yourself is if you have Him and His strength to carry the cross on your journey through life.

Just like when a country that prides itself on welcoming the oppressed will crumble if those same people decide to make no contribution to it, so the same holds for the Church if her people remain selfish about God's grace and refuse to spread God's love. And indeed, the more you grow in the faith, you'd think it will get more comfortable and you'd be used to it, but actually, the more you know of God's Word, the more burdened you may feel, the more aware of sin within your self you've become. But before you fall due to frustration, remember the forgiving rest and peace that Jesus gives and you have it here in this very place when you confess your sins to the Lord.

Jesus has invited you here to relieve your burden, to give you rest. To answer Saint Paul's question, here, you are being rescued

from this body of death. Believe that you don't have to work at it, but simply believe and rejoice that Jesus did all He did for your sake. For as proud as we should be of our country after this notable American holiday, we should be just as thankful to God that we are allowed to live in a land that welcomes the tired and the poor. But even more than that, we rejoice and ponder with wonder in our hearts at the greater gift, and that is found in the beautiful words from the lips of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Those words are the very same as, In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins...

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.